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# **Development Theory and the Ethnicity Question – The Cases of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand**

**Annette Kanstrup-Jensen**

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**Thesis no. 10**

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***Development Theory and the Ethnicity Question –  
The Cases of the Lao People's Democratic Republic  
and Thailand***



**PhD Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Aalborg University, 2006**

**Annette Kanstrup-Jensen**



*" Have you come to ask me, normally they come and tell us what to do?"*  
(Mr. Sohtou, Village Chief, Ban Houaytoumay, Lao PDR)



## **Acknowledgements**

In the **Lao PDR** the villagers in Ban Houaytoumai and Ban Denkang made it possible for me to enlarge my knowledge on indigenous learning by letting me be more than a guest in terms of involving me in cultural activities. I would like to thank Nang Nang (Akha) and Miss. Amphai Khamla for being in charge of the interviews and translation in Ban Houaytoumai and good company at the NCA project site. Nang Bounmee should be praised for her helpfulness and hospitality and also thanks to Mr. Bountavie for facilitating the interviews in Ban Denkang. I thank Mr. Kongchy Yeayang (Hmong) for his great interest in the research in connection with interviewing as well as for translation, as well as Mr. Vanthong Petdouangsi (Akha) for his efforts in translating the Akha concepts into Lao language. My sincere thanks go to my friend and former colleague Mrs. Minavanh Pholsena for her assistance in all phases of the project. Her knowledge of European academic tradition combined with her extended experience within development issues from her own country as well as her cultural sensitivity and politeness has been of inestimable value for the research. I would also like to thank Mr. Sompong Pholsena for his impeccable translations from Lao into English. Dr. Arthur Crisfield has been most helpful in bringing me up to date concerning innovative education projects in the country throughout the whole process. I would also like to express my thanks to economist Dr. Richard Noonan for keeping me abreast with the national development plans for ethnic minorities and for sharing his insight with me. Deputy Director of General Education at the Ministry of Education and Vice Chairman of the Basic Education (Girls) Project, Ms. Khanthaly Siriphongphanh should be thanked for taking time out for me during a very busy period.

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## **Preface**

The current study has been undertaken at the Research Centre on Development and International Relations, Institute for History, International and Social Studies, at the Faculty of Social Sciences Aalborg University, Denmark. In terms of financial support the study has been feasible thanks to funds allocated by the former Council for Development Research (RUF), under the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The motivation for choosing South East Asia as the area of research is my 3 years' working experience as Education Adviser (1992-94) and Human Resource Development Co-ordinator (1994-95) in the Lao PDR for Norwegian Church Aid Organisation. A requirement of the position was to arrange study trips in the region, especially to Thailand, in order for my Lao colleagues to learn from the Thai experiences concerning human development and education among ethnic groups. The practical work was followed up by studies at the Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester, England, where I submitted my Masters thesis "Education among Ethnic Minority Groups in the Lao PDR" in 1996. Both experiences encouraged me to pursue the topic in a wider, more theoretical, perspective.

The foundation for the discussions is a field research work among ethnic minority groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand. Two Hmong and Akha communities in each of the two countries were given the opportunity to expand on indigenous learning practices and concepts of education and human development. To supplement the statements from the four researched villages, non-Western development workers "triangulated" the research through discussions with representatives from Hmong and Akha groups in non-researched villages. Round table discussions with indigenous thinkers, interviews with national and international resource persons and organisations involved in development among ethnic minority groups completed the field research. In its entity, the empirical research data collection covered 6 phases over a period of two years.

Furthermore, evaluation reports by independent, international development consultants are taken into consideration in the analysis.



## **Structure of the Dissertation**

The Introduction (Chapter 1) situates the dissertation within the body of social sciences and provides the necessary background for the discussion of education and human development among ethnic minority groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand. The transformation towards a more Western, modern society has dire consequences for approximately half of the population in the Lao PDR and for a relatively smaller population (< 2%) in Thailand. As the Lao PDR has been a forgotten and closed country and because of its turbulent history, the country is given slightly more attention than Thailand in the introductory chapter.

The problem-formulation presents the themes to be explored in the dissertation in terms of why it is important to give voice to excluded population groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand and why it is important to challenge the homogenising development discourse that dominates in the West.

Chapter 2 discusses Western influence in terms of concepts as well as the predominant Western-centric approach at the operational level. The problem of universality and rights contributes to illustrate the dichotomy between Western paradigms and indigenous epistemology, and hence to uncover what might be the main hindrances for capability formation among indigenous communities.

Chapter 3 introduces the research framework for the dissertation. The first part conceptualises “ethnic minority” and brings ethnicity back into the development discourse, as well as providing a brief overview of the historical marginalisation and exclusion of indigenous populations in the Lao PDR and Thailand. The second part discusses the Western understanding of human development as well as including a critique of the paradigm. This section also examines the Human Resource Development policy in the Lao PDR and Thailand. The last section treats the nexus between education and socio-economic development. The formation of human capital in the two countries seems to be modelled after Western development theories, and the section discusses the minority education policy in the era of modernisation, which has increased the constraints on the ethnic minority groups for retaining influence of their own development process.

The research methodology in Chapter 4 continues the discussion of Western supremacy with respect to development issues. The first part presents the multiple considerations concerning theories and methodologies that the Western researcher needs to reflect upon before undertaking field research among indigenous peoples. The second part of the chapter introduces the features of the ethnic groups under study followed by the rationale and selection criteria for choosing the

particular communities. A short profile of the sample groups precedes a description of the data collection methods and reflections on how to interpret the data from the 4 communities, non-researched villages, and local and foreign resource persons.

In the first part of Chapter 5 the 4 selected communities present their educational practices and concepts in their own words. The researcher's interpretation (here an analysis would have necessitated the involvement of the interviewees themselves which has not been possible) of the field research among the Hmong and Akha groups is followed by discussions on eventual obsolescence and possible misinterpretations of indigenous learning. The second part is an account of the formal education programmes in the two countries followed by a discussion of the shortcomings of the role of states because of their concepts and practice of education policies. After a review of non-formal and life-skills education programmes the last part of the chapter asks the question regarding whether developing countries can learn from aid education philosophy.

(Chapter 5 of the dissertation will be translated into Lao and Thai and given to the 4 researched villages. I find it most ethical to return what I have borrowed from them: their time and their knowledge).

By applying tools from 3 different Western originated theoretical approaches, the analysis in Chapter 6 substantiate why neither of them offers adequate solutions to heterogeneous societies as in the cases of the Lao PDR and Thailand.

The conclusion, Chapter 7, follows up by reflecting on the deficiencies in the dominant development discourse with regard to ethnic minority groups and their adaptation to modernisation and globalisation. For cultural survival counterhegemonic knowledge, as found within indigenous communities, is an indispensable contribution to theoretical approaches in heterogeneous societies.

The sketch below provides an overview of the structure of the dissertation:

CHAPTER 1

The development  
problematique in the Lao  
PDR & Thailand as multi-  
ethnic societies

CHAPTER 2

Western epistomological  
hegemony

CHAPTER 3

Framework  
(onthology)

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

CHAPTER 5

Indigenous practices and concepts of  
education and human development in  
selected Akha and Hmong  
communities in the Lao PDR and  
Thailand

CHAPTER 6

Western theoretical  
hegemony

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

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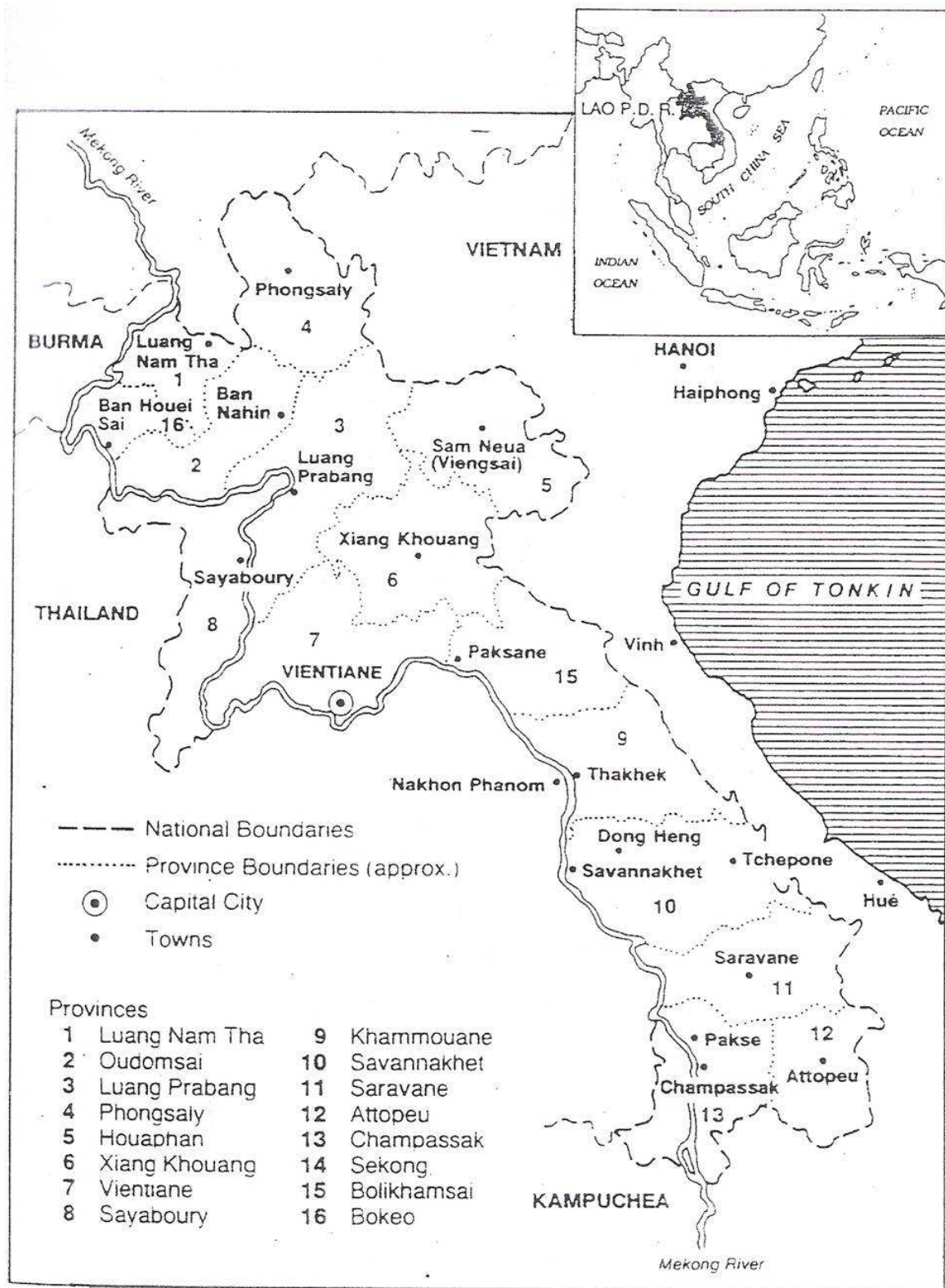
## **List of Abbreviations**

ACEID	Asia-Pacific Centre of Educational Innovation for Development
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
AsDB	Asian Development Bank
CLC	Community Learning Centre
DGE	Department of General Education (Lao PDR)
DNFE	Department for Non-formal Education
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
EOI	Export Oriented Industrialisation
EWLP	Experimental World Literacy Programme
FE	Formal Education
GNP	Gross National Product
GO	Government Offices
GoL	Government of the Lao PDR
GoT	Government of Thailand
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HADF	Hill Areas Development Foundation
HAE	Hill Areas Education
HD	Human Development
HRD	Human Resource Development
HTEC	Hill Tribe Education Centre
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
ILEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMPECT	Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association
INTRAC	International Non-Governmental Organisation Training and Research Centre
IWGIA	International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs
LDC	Least Developed Country
MoE	Ministry of Education, Thailand

## *List of Abbreviations*

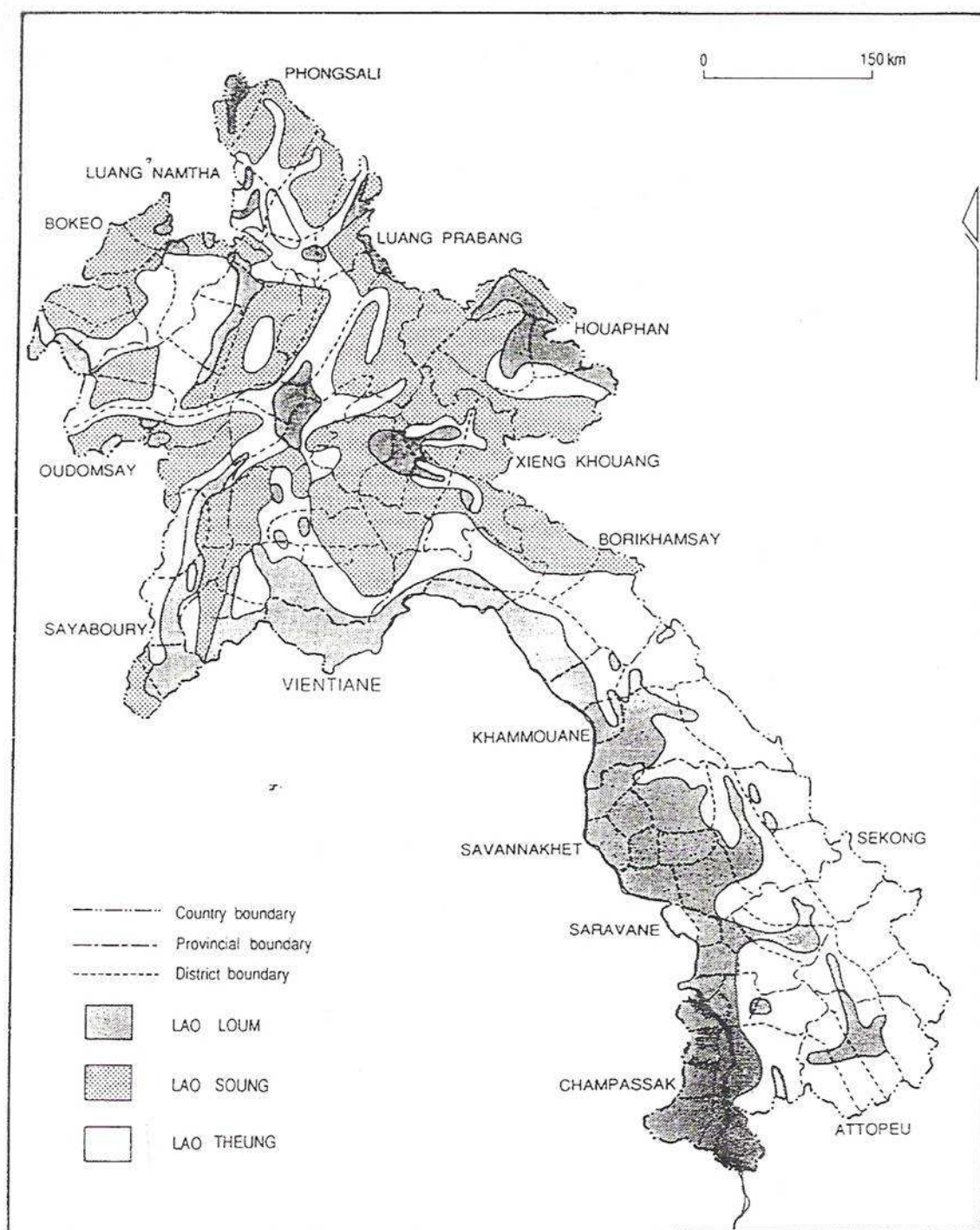
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MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports (Lao PDR)
MRC	Mekong River Commission
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NFE	Non-formal Education
NORRAG	Northern Policy Research Review and Advisory Network on Education and Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONEC	Office of National Education Commission (Thailand)
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SCN	Save the Children Norway
SEAMP	South East Asian Mountain Peoples Foundation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
TA	Technical Assistance
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
TAO	Tambon [subdistrict] Administrative Organisations (Thailand)
TG-HDP	Thai-German Highland Development Project
TNC	Transnational Corporation
TPA	Teacher Parents Association
TTD	Teacher Training Department (Lao PDR)
UN	United Nations
UNDCP	United Nations Drugs Control Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFDAC	United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control, Thailand
UNRISD	United Nations research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VTHE	Vocational, technical and Higher Education (Lao PDR)
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All
WE	World Education
WTO	World Trade Organisation

**Map 1: The Lao People's Democratic Republic**


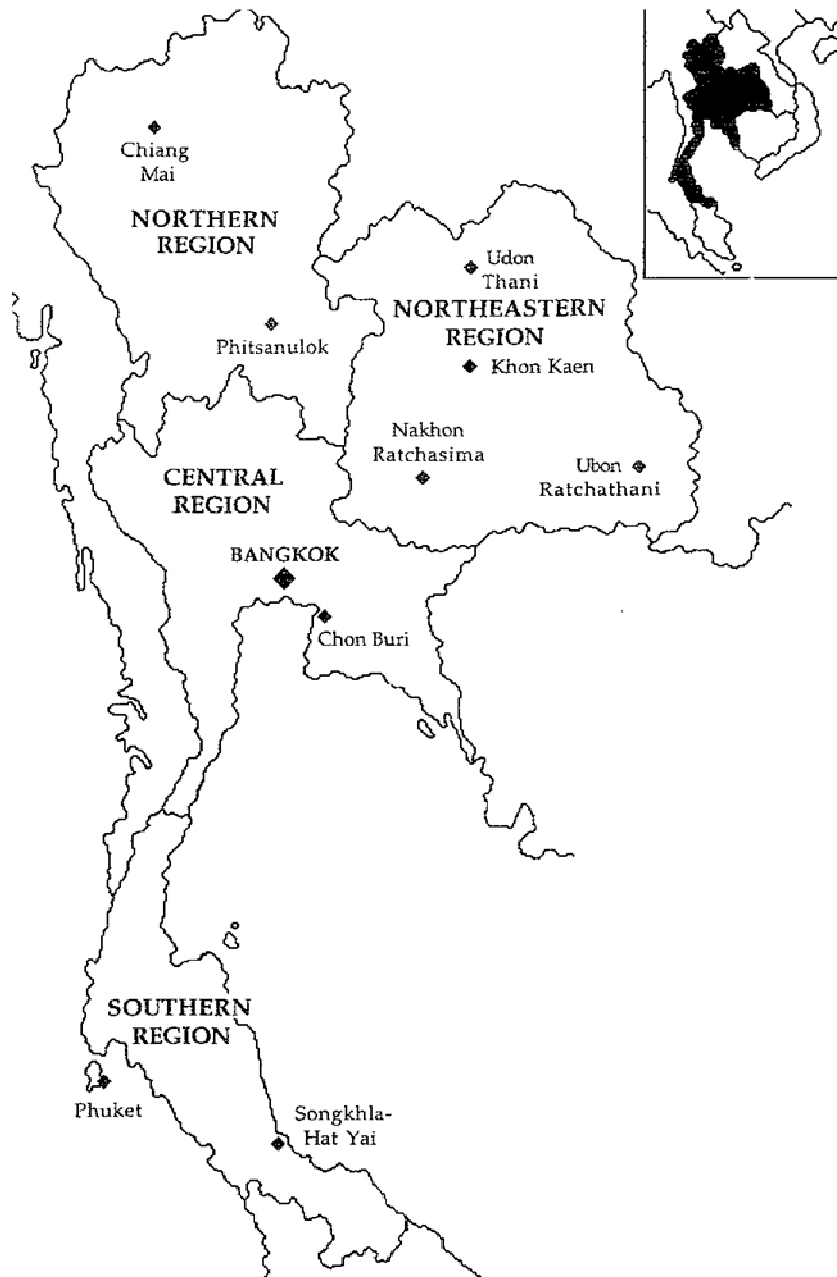
Source: Stuart-Fox a 1986, p.xvii

**Map 2: Distribution of Ethnic Groups in the Lao PDR**



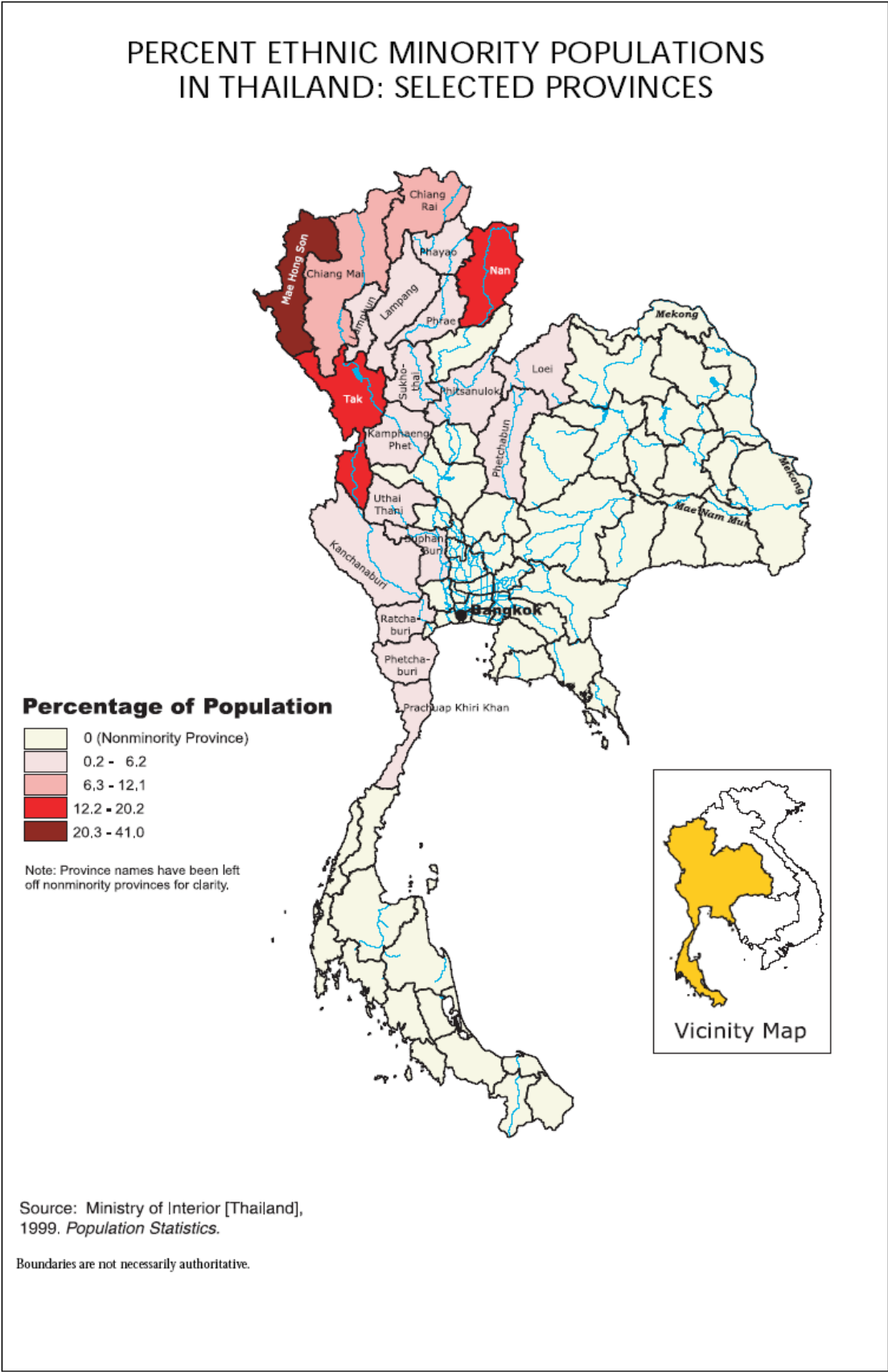
Source: UNDP 1990

**Map 3: Main Regional Centres, Thailand**

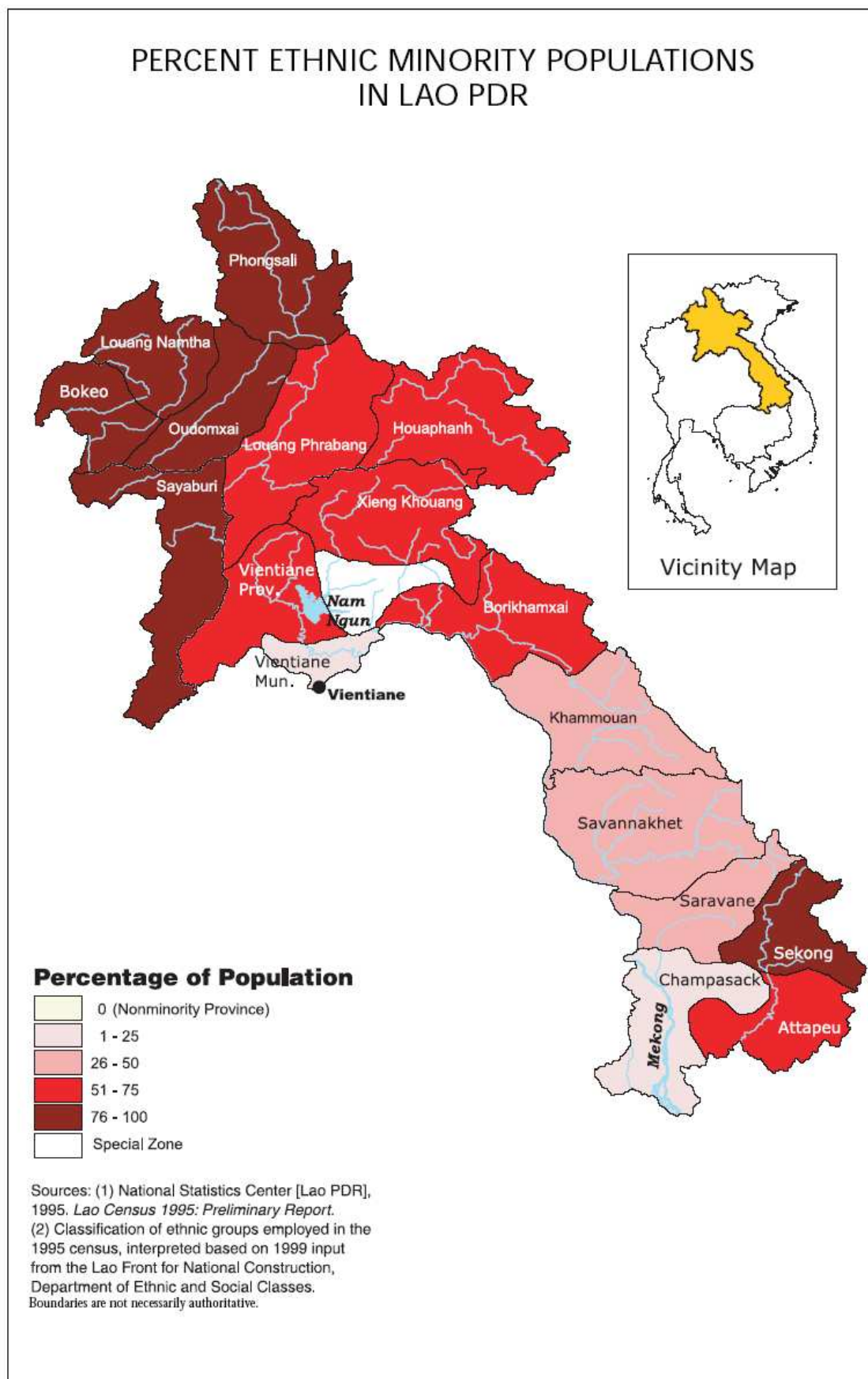




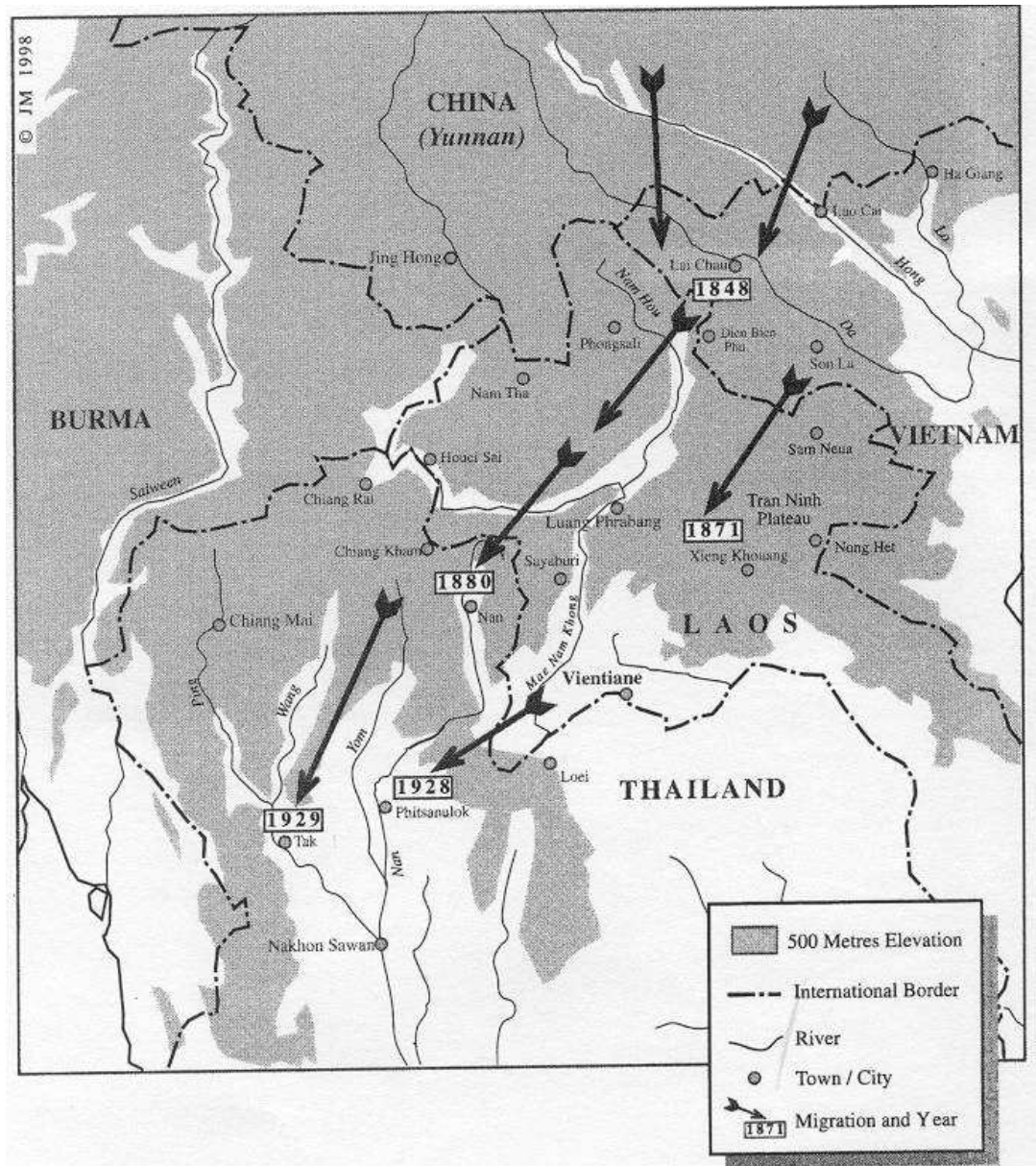
Map 4: Percent Ethnic Minority Populations in Thailand



**Map 5: Percent Ethnic Minority Populations in Lao PDR**



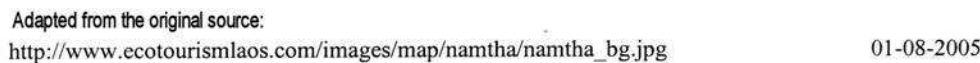
**Map 6: Hmong Migrations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**



## Map 7: Akha Occupancy in Mainland Southwest Asia

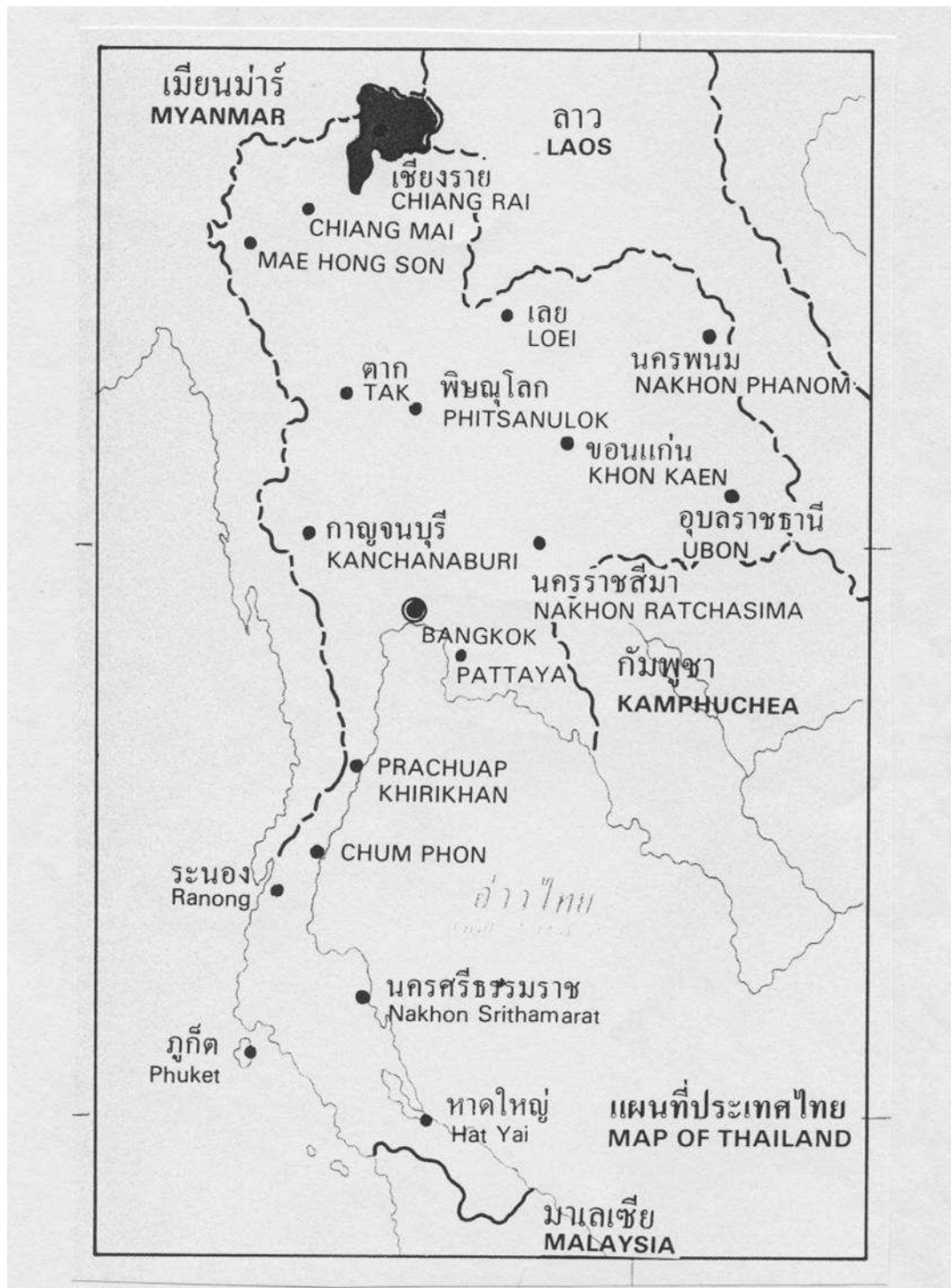


Map 3-1. Area of Akha occupancy in which their villages are interspersed with those of other hill people. Courtesy of Cornelia Ann Kammerer.



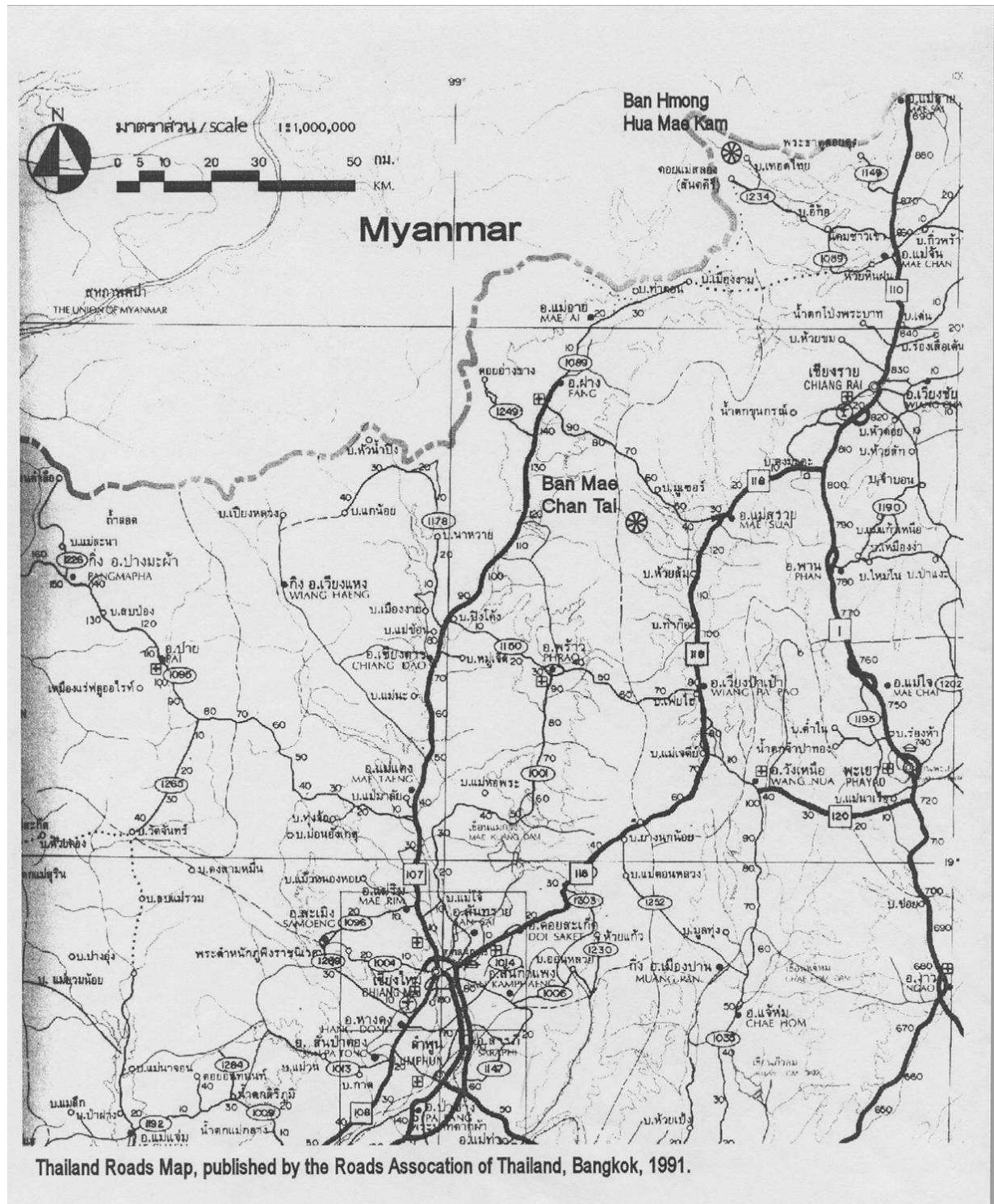


Map 9: Chiang Rai Province, Thailand





## Map 10: Thailand, Chiang Rai – Researched Villages



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

The first part of the chapter identifies the position of the dissertation within the social sciences and the multidisciplinary approaches that are deemed necessary.

The second part presents a picture of the socio-economic, political and cultural situation in the Lao PDR. The landlocked country in South East Asia has until recently only received limited attention from the international community. However, the attempt to adjust to increasing globalisation is changing the country in nearly all areas and aspects of life. Half a century after independence and wars the country is, in this context, trying to find its way to modernisation between socialism and capitalism, a path that is paved with numerous dilemmas.

The third part discusses the development priorities in Thailand, the unevenness in the process and the challenge that the ethnic minority groups represent in the country's efforts to retain its position as a South East Asian Tiger.

The problem-formulation constitutes the last part of the introduction. The dissertation tries to throw light on some of the reasons why the existing human development and education programmes have limited success in dealing with indigenous populations.

### 1.1. Situating the Dissertation within the Body of Social Science

As indicated in the title the dissertation intends to treat the "Ethnicity Question". This problematique can be looked at from many angles e.g. in connection with self-determination, territorial rights etc. However, the dissertation will examine the ethnicity question in relation to the hegemony of the Western development discourse in which the heterogeneity and cultural dichotomy in most developing countries is only slightly taken into account.

This bias is nowhere more significant than in the *human development* and *education* strategies and programmes planned for and implemented among ethnic minority groups in the developing world. In a globalised world the development of human resources is of paramount importance, and not least in countries of great cultural diversity. Ethnic minority groups are in danger of becoming more marginalised because of the lack of recognition of their concepts and practices.

Because ethnicity can be considered as an orphan of development theory, it is difficult to situate the dissertation in the context of definite schools of thought within the body of social sciences. By incorporating the target groups' own expectations and traditions through the

minority people's own conceptualisations and understandings coming to the fore, the dissertation seeks to rectify the anomaly created by the externalisation of the question of ethnicity from the development discourse. In such an endeavour it is necessary to broaden the space of research, and abandon conventional unidisciplinary-based procedures and transgress barriers by applying multidisciplinary in terms of different methodological and theoretical perspectives and approaches. As the dissertation revolves around the issues of the integration/exclusion of minority groups from projects of nation-building in the context of modernisation and globalisation, it is essential to relate implicitly to tools and concepts of development theory and international political economy.

Within the framework of what is termed alternative development in the West the final analysis in the dissertation will borrow tools from anthropological research, from disciplines pertaining to the study of education and human development, and finally asking the question of whether it is time to let the indigenous population groups own concept of theories contribute to future research methodologies.

## **1.2. Background to the Lao PDR Problematique**

The Lao PDR is the poorest country in South East Asia and it is also one of the least studied, "...yet [it] is undergoing perhaps the most radical process of social and economic re-orientation in the region" (Rigg 1995:166). The external and internal dilemmas, the country is faced with in the modernisation process, are challenges of both of socio-economic, political/ideological and cultural nature.

In the context of this dissertation it is important to understand the challenges that the Lao PDR is facing in the transition period from plan- to market oriented economy. At least two factors make the focus on the modernisation process in the Lao PDR interesting: a turbulent past and a large contingent of ethnic minority groups. One of the paradoxes in studying the history of the country is the question of whether the Lao PDR exists "...as a 'real' entity". The veteran analyst of Lao politics, Arthur Dommen, claims that "...it is more a conglomeration of 'tribes' than a people" (cited in Evans 1999:1).

### **Short historical Overview**

The known political history of the area between the Mekong River and the frontiers of China and Vietnam reaches back to the 14th century when a group of small Lao states formed

themselves as independent entities. The following centuries were times of internal political instability in the pre-colonial principalities Louang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Vientiane and Champassak, as well as external pressures from Siam and Vietnam. Finally France crowned the outside control by colonising Laos in 1893 (until 1949)<sup>1</sup>.

The French colonialists had made little improvements concerning the infrastructure in Laos. From independence in 1954 until 1975 the relations between Thailand and Laos were friendly, and the landlocked country's severe transport difficulties had been compensated for by trade routes through Thailand, especially by means of improved roads and railways in the north-eastern region of Thailand (Rigg 1995:158).<sup>2</sup> The relationship between the two countries cooled off with the communist seizure of power in 1975 in the Lao PDR, and "...its subsequent isolation from the Western world was reflected in the total closure of the Thai-Lao border" (Inuma 2002:169). Vietnam stationed about 30.000 soldiers in the Lao PDR to resist eventual threats from Thailand (Ibid., p.169), which further deteriorated the relationship between the two neighbours. During the years of confrontation in South East Asia "Thailand consistently used the border as a political tool and as an economic weapon"; the Lao PDR was "...caught in the maelstrom of superpower conflict" (Rigg 1995:158). There were now two competing blocs in the region: the market economies of the ASEAN countries and the communist countries of "Indochina" including the Lao PDR. Economically the Lao PDR had been dependent on Thailand, and the Lao government's response to the lost trade opportunities was to turn to Vietnam by means of improved transport links<sup>3</sup>.

Historically, Vietnam especially has been a true ally of the Lao PDR. "Vietnam and China are neighbors and their respective influences on the Lao regime are greater than those of any other country" (Stuart-Fox 2004:30). Both China, as the main engine of economic growth in the region, and Vietnam have rapidly escalating economies, and they both provide extensive assistance in terms of military aid (including ideological training) and infrastructure projects to the Lao PDR (Ibid.,p.31). As these two communist countries have experienced an economic boom while maintaining their ideological standpoint, Stuart-Fox claims that they continue to encourage the Lao PDR to "...pursue similar economic policies. But it is in the interest of neither China nor Vietnam to exert any pressure for political reform – especially as neither

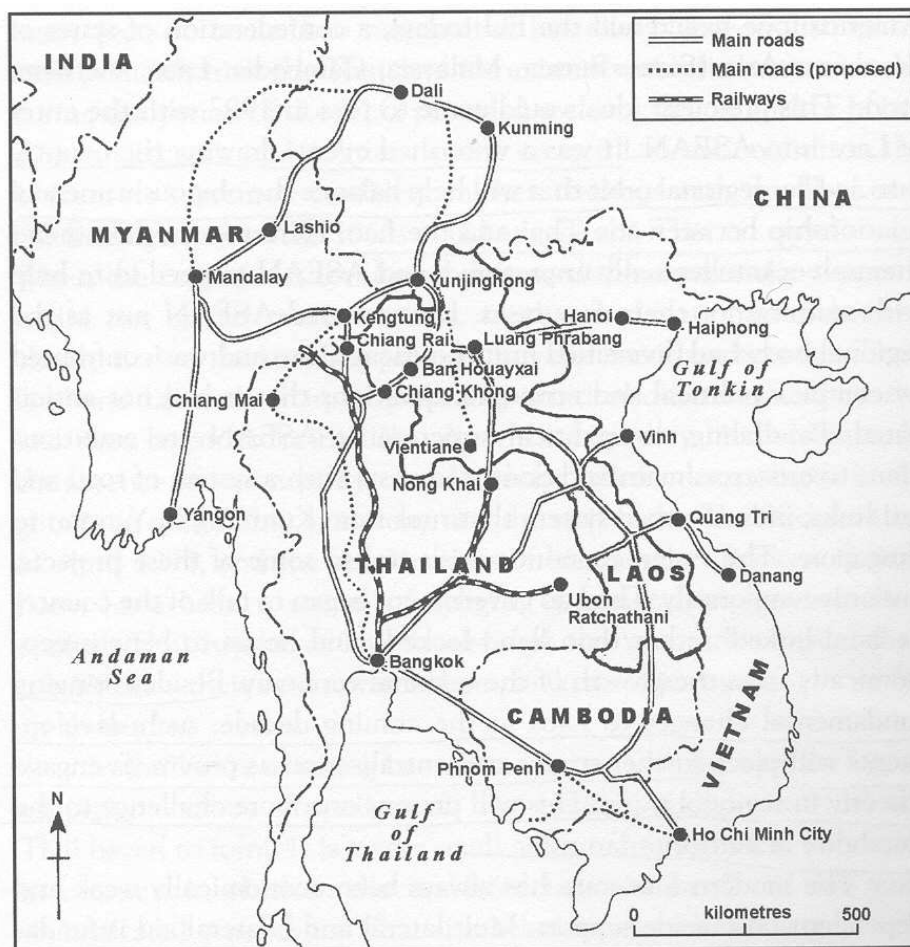
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<sup>1</sup> The French colonial possessions in Indochina also encompassed Vietnam, Cambodia and Annam which all became French protectorates during the period from 1858 – 84.

<sup>2</sup> Rigg estimates that before 1975 80% of official trade passed through Thailand (Rigg 1995:158)

<sup>3</sup> Like Thailand, Vietnam had the necessary coastline, and now only 20 % of the Lao official trade went through Thailand after 1975, although "... it should be emphasized that this does not negate the fact that Thailand remains Laos' logical conduit to the sea" (Rigg 1995 p.158)

favors such reform in their own countries”(Ibid.,p.31). The Lao PDR is important for both countries: for Vietnam because of “...its long and vulnerable western border, and for China because Laos provides an avenue deep into mainland Southeast Asia” (Ibid., p.31). Thus from being an isolated, peripheral and landlocked country its position (being the only country bordering all the countries in the region) the Lao PDR may now prove to be of enhanced interest for whole region<sup>4</sup> (the Lao PDR, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Southwest China). See map below:



Future roads and railways for mainland Southeast Asia. The planned expansion of road and rail links across the region in the coming decades is likely to have a profound effect on Laos internally and externally.

(Source: Evans 2002:230)

Thus from 1975 until the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991 the Lao PDR had been economically, ideologically and politically dependent on the communist

<sup>4</sup> In 1995 Stuart-Fox was so optimistic as to state: “Laos may even revert in the twenty-first century to what it was five centuries ago – the heart of the region, the crossroads where trade routes intersect” (“Laos: Towards Subregional Integration” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 1995, p.177-179)

allies in the region and with a problematic relationship with Thailand. The disintegration of the Soviet bloc has had a significant impact on the strategies for economic development, and nearly all ex-socialist countries started converting their economies from a centralised planning system towards a more market oriented economy. The result is that the power of the global economy<sup>5</sup> removed some of the major tools of states to control their own economic future (Griffith 2001: xv).

The changed economic and political landscape in South East Asia forced the Lao PDR to seek external economic assistance in the West, and during the 1990s the western economic influence on the country was, and continues to be, substantial. Like other countries in the region the Lao PDR's modernisation policy contain elements that reflect the hegemony of the West defined as an overriding economic and ideological influence.

Besides the societal transformation and the economic dependence on foreign aid, two regional factors have contributed to the change in Lao economic policies as well as the total isolation policy has been abandoned:

- a) the opening of the Mekong River Friendship Bridge between Thailand and the Lao PDR in 1994 and
- b) the country's full membership in ASEAN in 1997.

The ruling party (Lao People's Revolutionary Party) maintain their Marxist-Leninist ideology, but opposed to other socialist countries like e.g. Cuba and North Korea the Lao government has decided that the country's future economic development must follow a pragmatic course, not only inspired by the Chinese experience, but also for its own survival (i.e. economic achievement in exchange for political legitimacy)<sup>6</sup>. According to Stuart-Fox, Kaysone was in favour of economic reforms and that China was the country to follow (Stuart-Fox 2004:25). There is no doubt that there is a certain truth in this statement, as the former president Kaysone Phomvihan, is still considered *the* Marxist-Leninist educationalist<sup>7</sup>.

During the de-colonisation phase and the disorganisation at the end of the Second World War the Viet-Minh communists had begun to spread their influence in Laos and the leader of the

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<sup>5</sup> According to Carnoy "A global economy is one whose strategic, core activities, including innovation, finance and corporate management, function on a planetary scale on real time"(Real time meaning that information is exchanged or communicated as it is produced) (Carnoy 1998:21)

<sup>6</sup> On the 29th Dec 2004 China consolidated its influence in the region by signing (in Vientiane) a free trade agreement with the 10 members of ASEAN affirming the removal of tariffs "for their 2 billion people by [the] decade's end – a key step in their vision of a trade bloc to rival Europe and North America" (Retrieved from the Internet: [www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-11/29/content\\_395755.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-11/29/content_395755.htm) (3.Dec 2002).

<sup>7</sup> After the former president's death in 1992, a real 'Kaysone cult' emerged, and "...the comrade's teachings" still play an important role (Evans 2002:208)



Pathet Lao (“Land of the Lao”) movement set up a resistance government in opposition to the Royal Lao Government. The years from 1945 to 1975, when the Pathet Lao assumed power, are often referred to as “the 30 years of struggle” – i.e. for independence and unity as well as a struggle between conflicting political ideologies.

Another contributing factor to the complex development process of the Lao PDR is the burden that the country –outside its own control- had to endure during the Second Indochina War (1964-1973). These years took a heavy toll on society not only in terms of lost lives especially among ethnic minority groups, spoiled arable land and enmity among the people of Laos, but the lack of control over the economy during the war added to the human tragedy. Stuart-Fox argues that “... the more than \$500 million of US economic assistance that flowed into the country during this decade did little to promote either private investment or infrastructure development” (1997:153-54). The USAID channelled most of the so-called development aid into ‘war-related activities’, such as provision of medical care and basic subsistence needs for war victims, air support and transportation as well as financing the annual budget deficit. The national product per capita increased, but was unevenly distributed; the average for the “un-monetized village economy” was less than one-third of that of the monetized sector (Ibid.:154). Although some achievements were made in health and education most sectors suffered as a result of the war, e.g. agricultural production decreased and it was necessary to import food, industry remained rudimentary while tin mining declined. The external funds- mainly the USAID- were not used primarily for general economic development, but to maintain political domination.

Within the internal political sphere the balance of power changed after the cease-fire agreement in 1973 between the Pathet Lao and the United States. The influence of the Pathet Lao increased parallel to the communist advance in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

### **Modernisation Process out of Isolation**

From 1975 on when the Communist Pathet Lao achieved victory and until the end of the 1980s, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), with its 5,2 mill. inhabitants (UNDP (a) 2000) suffered political isolation and economic marginality. ”In the context of the world system of relations, Laos virtually fell off the map after the full and final victory of the communist Pathet Lao in 1975” (Evans 1999:48). According to the Human Development

Reports the Lao PDR is still ranked among the lowest human development and lowest income countries<sup>8</sup>.

However, being positioned in the middle of some of the fastest growing economies in the world, the extremely rapid economic change that has taken place in South East Asia during the last three decades has not left the country untouched. At present the Lao PDR<sup>9</sup> still adheres to a type of socialist political system in a surrounding of economic and political liberalisation in South East Asia, where most countries have followed a dynamic state-centred type of development strategies. Even Vietnam is liberalising its economy and opening the country for greater insertion in the regional economy as well as in the world economy (Map 1).

What apparently remains unaffected is the political authoritarianism of the regime in spite of the collapse of European communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989. The societal project guiding the strategy policies is based on some form of socio-economic modernisation “The aim for the Lao PDR is to quit once and for all the status of a least developed country by the year 2020” (GoL 1998:6). In this endeavour the Lao PDR adopted the **New Economic Mechanism (NEM)** - endorsed by the Fourth Party Congress- in **1986** as an attempt to engage with international capital. The reason for this ambitious re-orientation was dissatisfaction with the politically centred plan-economy that had created deficiencies in the national administration, a declining production system and hence serious macro-economic imbalances. The new strategy was an adapted market-oriented economy.<sup>10</sup> According to Rigg the reform was not a deconstruction of the existing system, but an attempt to refine and reconstruct it so that the transition to socialism could continue; with regard to the agrarian sector it was foreseen to be based on a subsistence system to meet the growing market demand. (Rigg 2001:17-19). The ultimate goal of this reform process is to improve the living standard

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<sup>8</sup> The Lao PDR is ranked number 131 out of 173 countries (UNDP: Human Development Report 2001)

<sup>9</sup> In the dissertation the term “Laos” denotes the country before 1975, whereas the term “Lao PDR” refers to the country after the revolution in 1975 (except in direct quotations)

<sup>10</sup> The steps introduced to overcome the difficulties in the transitional phase can be summarised under three headings. The micro-economic measures encompass liberalisation of prices, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, promotion of foreign investments, deregulation of many industrial and service activities and the transition of agriculture from collectivisation to the private household system. The macro-economic policy has two main components: a) a rather strict monetary policy with more control over the money supply and greater autonomy granted to the Lao Central Bank and b) a stricter fiscal policy that incorporates a reduction of approximately 20% of civil servants and a tax reform to secure revenue. The third measure of the reform programme, the trade policy is rather liberal, including a significant reduction of import duties, the removal of most quotas and other import restrictions and a substantial reduction in the level of taxes on the export of primary products (Bourdet, Y. 1998:648-49).

One of the initiatives in the trade policy is the signing of what is called the “Trilateral Pact” – an agreement between the governments of Thailand, Vietnam and the Lao PDR. This agreement will “facilitate cross-border trade and travel, setting an important precedent for the free market traffic throughout mainland Southeast Asia” (Bangkok Post 27. Nov. 1999)

of the Lao people, and these modernisation measures should be seen as an attempt to bring about better efficiency and profitability utilisation of human resources.

An important step in the direction of turning the Lao PDR from an isolated and also in a figurative sense landlocked country to one with an open door policy was followed up, when the Lao PDR in **1990** signed the **World Declaration on Education for All Conference (WDEFA)** in Jomtien in Thailand. As a consequence Lao educators were exposed to mainstream world thinking on educational development. The importance of education in the development process of any country cannot be overrated. Education develops human resources by improving productivity and promoting the growth and prosperity of the individual and the society. (Thant & Vokes 1997:154 in Than and Tan). An education strategy is not least relevant in connection with the changed economic policy. Subsequently the Lao Government launched an explicit **Human Resource Development policy** document in **1995** which pleads for a strengthening of the competence level of public employees: "in order to have capabilities in the co-operation with other countries and to prepare the Lao PDR to be qualified for being admitted as an ASEAN member in the future" (GoL 1995:1).

In general, human resource development means a constant centrality on the formation of human beings starting from birth and concerning all aspects of life. For the Lao Government, the strategy is seen in a socialist perspective; hence the document states that "...the overall objectives of the human resource development in the Lao PDR are to develop people as good citizens who love the country, love the new regime, have good discipline and abide by the law, know how to accept and harmoniously combine the three interests, i.e. personal interest, collective interest and national interest..." (Ibid.:2). In other words, according to some studies of the Lao PDR, the Lao regime is moulding the new socialist man (Evans 1995:1).<sup>11</sup> This is to be understood not only as a "new industrial man "... who can fulfil the new labour market requirements. The struggle for political and ideological unity among the different groups in the country necessitates the creation of a culturally new man, inculcated with socialist values (Ibid.,p.1) This concept is further stressed as one of the two main objectives in the **follow-up document on human resource development**, edited in **1998 (Précis)**, where "...a holistic and integrated view of human development" also should be understood as "...a shared platform of values as a necessary continuum of reference for our future" (GoL 1998:3). The document

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<sup>11</sup> This ideological concept was already introduced in 1977 by Kaysone Phomvihane, the leader of the Lao Communist Party since its foundation in 1955 until his death in 1992, by stating that the cultural and ideological revolution will create a "new socialist man – a new type of man who engages in labor with a spirit of collective

presents a more precise format of the operational view of the implementation strategies within the different components of the human resource development programme for the period 1998 – 2001, and an overview of the estimated investment requirements. It is also intended to be an undisguised signal to donor agencies that the Lao Government is no longer a passive recipient, but an active player, and that a dialogue between the two parts is imperative.

With regard to external relations the Lao regime has adhered to a course for coming out of isolation. The existence of the **Mekong River Commission** (MRC) in the region is a further sign of the Lao PDR's rapprochement to the leading South East Asian countries. The four co-riparian states of the Lower Mekong – Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam – signed an agreement on Co-operation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin. The Mekong River Commission was founded in **1995** with the participation of China, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> By claiming geographical centrality in the Greater Mekong Sub-region,<sup>13</sup> the Lao PDR succeeded in having the headquarters moved to Vientiane in 2004.

In 1992, the Lao Minister of Foreign Affairs signed the Bali Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in South East Asia, whereby the Lao PDR was accorded observer status in the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**<sup>14</sup>. The country obtained full membership in **1997**.<sup>15</sup>

The above-mentioned measures fit in with the Lao PDR's attempts to engage in regional affairs. There are contrasting perceptions among scholars concerning the country's future role. The Lao PDR's place within the wider South East Asian mainland vary from being considered as "marginal", "backward" and "peripheral" at the one end and to be seen as a "keystone" at

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mastery, who profoundly loves the country and socialism and who has a clear spirit of internationalism" (Ng Shui Meng in Zasloff & Unger 1991p.161)

<sup>12</sup> This commission replaced the Mekong Secretariat which was established in 1958 (Evans, 1999:53)

<sup>13</sup> The Mekong River basin covers 97% of the area of the Lao PDR <<http://staff.dhi.dk/tkn/mekong/agreem.htm>> (11 March 2001)

<sup>14</sup> Potentially, ASEAN offers the member states as a group the possibility of preserving their interests. Thus, the association can be seen as an attempt to impede the growing economic and military power of China. Another advantage for the member states is that the organisation offers a framework "not only for promoting regional peace but also for resisting external interference". The organisation seeks to achieve "enough strength to resist increased US and European pressure for environmental protection and Western-style democratic reforms and human rights" (Ivarsson et al. 1995:28)

<sup>15</sup> In 2000 the Lao PDR hosted a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers and delegates from the European Union. The Foreign Minister told the press that the Lao PDR now has relations with 109 countries, 65 more than before the communist seizure of power (Indochina Chronology, Vol XIX No.4 Oct-Dec.2000). The ASEAN chairmanship rotates annually in alphabetical order. On June 28 2004 Indonesia handed over the chairmanship to the Lao PDR <[news.xinhuanet.com/english/2004-06/28/content-1552299.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2004-06/28/content-1552299.htm)> (2<sup>nd</sup> July 2004)

the other end; and some even describe “Laos as both the core and periphery at one and the same time” (Jerndal & Rigg in Evans 1999:35). The Lao Government is trying to establish a regional role for the country. The leaders see the country as strategically positioned for being a main component in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. However, despite the country’s geographically ideal location in the region, this prospect seems rather unattainable. The country is too small to be a big player in regional politics. Economically, the domestic market is very limited with low purchasing power of the inhabitants - mostly poor farmers distributed over a relatively large area. Furthermore, the underdeveloped transport infrastructure increases the fragmentation of the national economy.

### **Socio-Economic Disparities**

Internally, the physical geography of the country presents a series of dichotomies. On the one hand, the east-west axis illustrates the socio-economic and cultural disparity between the richer west and the poorer east. Economic activities are concentrated along Route 13, the main north-south highway following the Mekong River and neighbouring Thailand. On the other hand, the Lao PDR is inextricably linked to the Thai economy, not least because of the expanding informal sector. “Laos is at the risk of becoming simply an appropriate place to build a highway - a transshipment station linking other, far more economically vibrant areas, and in particular Thailand’s Northeastern region and Southern China “(Rigg in Dixon & Smith 1998:163). The largest urban areas, Louang Prabang, Vientiane, Savannakhet and Paksé are all situated on the Mekong, and the Friendship Bridge, built in 1994 links Vientiane and Nong Khai in Thailand. The alluvial lowlands make intensification of agricultural activities possible. Hence the population density in this area is high as compared to the rest of the country.

The north – south divide reveals perhaps even more severe geo-political problems. In the northern mountainous provinces arable land is scarce and deforestation causing soil erosion makes agriculture difficult.<sup>16</sup> The southern provinces (except for Attapeu and Sekong Provinces) have, on the other hand, plentiful resources of alluvial lowlands which allow farmers to produce a surplus of rice while high but, it should be noticed, rapidly decreasing forest area form the basis of industrial activities. Improved infrastructure has resulted in better access to markets attracting foreign commercial attention (See map p.4). The negative aspect is however “...that neighbouring countries’ interest in Laos lies mainly in its abundant natural resources” (Jerndal & Rigg in Evans 1999:56). As the mountainous areas in the North, the two

poorest provinces in the South, Attapeu and Sekong, are deprived of benefiting from fertile farming land and access to extended markets.

Historically, geographical factors, topographic divisions and the lack of means of transportation gave the old separate kingdoms in the eighteenth century as well as the regional power bases during the “30 years of struggle” a comprehensive autonomy. A certain regional independence is “...given official recognition and even encouragement“ by the communist government. The need for justification concerning the decentralisation policy is related to the fact that local leaders – many from minority groups – have resisted waiving their sovereignty which gave the respective regions the right to trade directly with neighbouring countries and thereby strengthen their local economy. Another contributing factor to regional autonomy is the fact that lack of resources has forced the central government to make a virtue of necessity by encouraging regional self-sufficiency. Consequently provincial agricultural self-sufficiency is an accepted key objective - irrespective of the uneven endowment of natural resources between provinces, aggravating the tendency toward socio-economic inequalities in the country. (Stuart-Fox 1996:173-74).

In fertile areas where existing roads allow market integration, farmers, small-scale industries and service institutions benefit from the incentives enshrined in the New Economic Mechanism. Richer households have been offered new opportunities and goods are being sold at free market values, but poorer households are not in a position to gain any advantage. As a consequence, in the upland and highland areas the reforms are often irrelevant.

### **Cultural Dichotomy**

People inhabiting the upland and highland areas belong mainly to minority groups of other ethnic descents than the lowland population, giving the country a significant cultural disparity. If the Lao PDR is considered as peripheral in the regional context, the national “core-periphery” divide is of a more serious nature. The ethnic diversity in the Lao PDR is an important aspect in many studies, but is often underestimated - and even ignored - because of its complexity.

In an entity as ethnically diverse as the Lao PDR it is almost impossible to arrive at a classification that captures the true ethnic richness of the country. The Lao Government

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<sup>16</sup> 80% of the country is defined as mountainous (Evans 1999:43)

classifies the population in three categories according to topography: Lao Loum ('Lowland Lao'), Lao Theung ('Midland -or Upland Lao') and Lao Soung ('Highland Lao'). Nonetheless, this threefold division into Buddhist wet-rice cultivating Lao Loum, nearly exclusively living along the Mekong, the upland cultivating Lao Theung, mainly inhabiting the Eastern part of the country, and the mountain-dwelling, swidden agriculture and animist Lao Soung in the North is based on a simplistic approach (Map 2). This classification of the population could be interpreted as an attempt to stress the economic, ideological and cultural superiority of the dominant Lao Loum, which could be termed as an attempt of "lao-loumification", while retaining the nation-building project. As expressed by Ivarsson et al. "...instead of using the names of the minority groups ... the regime combines the names of the ethnic minority groups with a geographical denominator in order to stress national unity over ethnic diversity." (Ivarsson et al.1995:43).

However, in terms of cultural and linguistic heritage, this categorisation is insufficient to present the diversity in the country. According to the 1995 census about 52,5 % of the population are ethnic Lao (referring to Lao-speaking ethnic groups) while the remaining 47,5% belong to other ethnic groups. (AsDB: Lao PDR Country Report, 2000:17-18)<sup>17</sup>. The present study will not engage in any discussion regarding the basis for classification of ethnic minorities, but one could argue that in order to do justice to each group, the best way of getting a picture of the diversity would be to refer to their particular self-identification. Research undertaken in the Lao PDR has shown that "...wherever a group identifies itself as having a distinct ethnonym, there are always explicit linguistic features that accompany and mark that distinction" (Chamberlain et al.1995:10). Because language is an unconscious phenomenon with internal consistencies in structure and systematic laws of sound change, it is the primary indicator of ethnic identity (as opposed to national identity). The 1995 census classifies the ethnic minorities into 47 different categories, and according to research carried out by anthropologists and ethnolinguists the number of non-ethnic Lao groups amounts to approximately 70 % (ILO 1999: iv). Even though language is a key indicator of ethnic affiliation, anthropological research shows that it is not an independent variable. Von Geusau elucidates the classification complexity when stating that "...ethnic identity in minority groups is the result of structural, economic and political, cultural and psychological elements that combine to keep groups together as opposed to and interaction with other groups, especially with a dominant majority." (von Geusau in Turton 2000:143).

Simplistic or elaborated systems of classification reveal that the dominant Lao Loum benefitted most from the economic reform measures. In contrast, gains that the ethnic minority groups obtain are trifling. The reason is that in remote areas inadequate infrastructure is the biggest impediment to economic development, while public services in terms of provision of health and education facilities are insufficient and as far as education is concerned may often be even irrelevant.

### **Development Challenges**

Unevenness is one of – if not - the biggest paradoxes in the development process that the Lao PDR shares with other least developed countries (LDCs). In trying to kickstart the Lao PDR's modernisation process, most minority groups are excluded or at least marginalised. In mainstream western terminology exclusion is mainly interpreted as lack of income.<sup>18</sup> However, this is not necessarily the South East Asian interpretation of being excluded. Economic status is often not the most important indicator. Poverty is first and foremost a social status, and exclusion is a multidimensional concept. Individuals or groups can be excluded because they live in remote areas, because they belong to a certain ethnic group, because they have no formal education, because they are considered as 'backwards' by the majority etc.<sup>19</sup> As Rigg phrases it: "...those who are failing to benefit from the reforms tend to [be] hill-dwelling, minority groups like the Hmong, Akha and Lahu". (Rigg in Dixon & Smith 1998:163). The two groups who have been involved in my research for this study are some Hmong and Akha communities in northern areas of the Lao PDR and Thailand.

The development context accentuates the inequalities in the country and reflects a paradoxical state of affairs which represents a challenge to the socio-economic and political transformation of this "forgotten country" (Evans 1999:48), and makes the Lao PDR particularly interesting from a development perspective. The country's modernisation has been characterised as "too much, too fast and too foreign" (Chagnon & Rumpf 1992:3), or "...the challenge that faces the Lao authorities is how to maintain their control over the development process" (Stuart-Fox 1996:245). It is estimated that at least half of the population is left behind in this evolution

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<sup>17</sup> The CIA World Factbook 2002 the Lao Loum constitute 68% of the population while other ethnic groups constitute the remaining 32 % (including 1% Vietnamese/Chinese) Retrieved from Website: [cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/la.htm](http://cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/la.htm) (12 March 2001)

<sup>18</sup> Evans 1999:58. "It is significant that Laos' integration into the region is seen almost exclusively in economic terms"

<sup>19</sup> Other groups that could be considered as excluded are e.g. refugees, migrant workers, political dissidents and prostitutes.



although a major objective is stated to be the inclusion of the ethnic minority groups in the general development: how to make use of the potential they represent in the national capacity building. It can be opined that to be successful such a strategy needs to pay great attention to socio-cultural aspects of development. The Lao attempts to restructure the whole education system with due consideration to the country's objective needs and constraints while paying attention to indigenous learning practices among the ethnic minority groups deserve recognition and encouragement. Although the Lao PDR needs to find its own path, lessons might be learnt from experiences with ethnic minority education and human development programmes in Thailand; a country that has had to face similar challenges.

### **1.3. The Two Thailands**

As Thailand has never been colonised in the conventional sense, its history has not been as turbulent as is the case of the Lao PDR with regards to external threats. On the other hand the internal political turmoil has been rather violent. However, already shortly after World War II Thailand was linked to the international development system e.g. membership of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1949. The U.S. Department of State began supporting the country in terms of technical assistance, as well as Thailand becoming a close ally of the United States (Muscat 1994 p.49-50). Muscat claims that "Modern Thai economic development is commonly reckoned as having gotten underway after 1958" (Ibid.,p.47)<sup>20</sup>, and a rapid economic growth-oriented development is still the priority of the Thai Government, despite the fact that the rapid economic growth "...has not resulted in equal welfare distribution and social justice among people and regions" (Parnwell & Arghiros in Parnwell 1996:9)

### **Dependent Development**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the small population of approximately one million cleared the forests and cultivated extensive areas, vast arable land was available. The majority of the population still lived in villages, and thus agricultural production had always been the foundation for the Thai economy (Phoingpaichit & Baker 1998:188). Still in the 1950s and 1960s "The agricultural sector was the Kingdom's main engine of growth and a major source of government revenue" (Dixon in Parnwell 1996:29). However, the establishment of the

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<sup>20</sup> Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat took personal power in 1958, and brought an end to the political instability that had prevailed since the abolition of the absolute monarchy (in 1932) (Muscat 1994:86). In 1973 King Bhumipol forced the military to share power with civilian politicians (Keyes in Muscat p.129) and thereby restored the monarchy "...albeit within the narrow legal constraints of constitutional monarchy" (Muscat 1994:129).

Board of Investment in 1959, prepared the ground for a modern industrial sector inviting domestic and foreign capital (Ibid.,p.29). Thus unlike the economic history of the Lao PDR Thailand has a longer tradition for private enterprises. The country's geo-political position as a buffer state against communist regimes in South – and South East Asia attracted foreign, especially American investment, and the diplomatic connection with the West was supplemented with economic support and change in politics. Before and during the Second Indochina War (1964-1973), Thailand hosted American military personnel and the country became a heaven for the troops in Vietnam coming to Thailand for Rest and Recreation. The results were an expansion in the service sector, and a growth of the urban centres in the vicinity of military bases (Ibid.,p.30). Infrastructural improvements were likewise due to American initiatives that "...opened up new agricultural areas, increased access to markets... and gave an important boost to the domestic construction industry" (Ibid.,p.30).

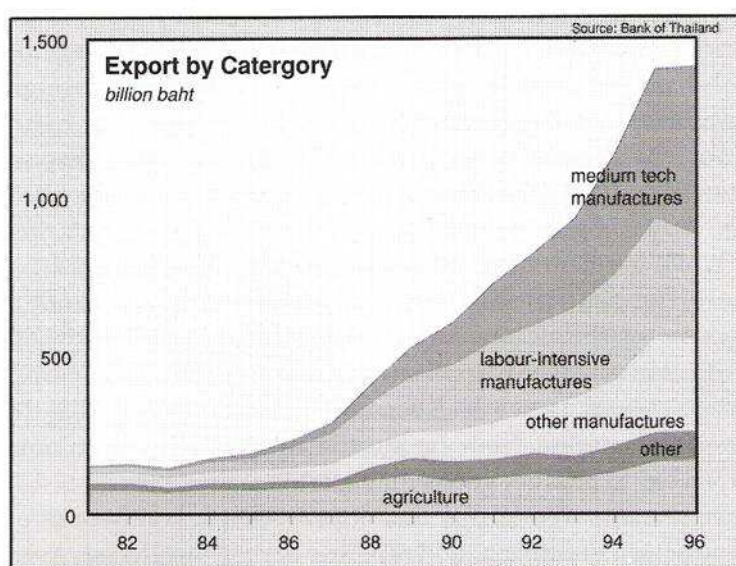
Along with the American military presence (the bases were abandoned in 1976) Trans-National Corporation companies had begun operating in Thailand already in the 1950s and 1960s, and foreign capital financed bigger enterprises. However, 85% of export earnings still came from primary products like rice, rubber and maize. From the 1970s these earnings were supplemented with capital from the growing tourist industry as well as from remittances. All these factors contributed to a Western cultural and ideological influence that is still noticeable in the Thai society.

As Thailand has always been heavily dependent on energy imports the oil crisis in 1973 and the rise in oil prices in 1979-1980 took its toll on the Thai economy, and the country's debt increased. Also regional upheavals and national unrest (Khmer Rouge takeover in Cambodia, Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, refugee flow from the region, including the Lao PDR, and internal insurgence in the rural areas in Thailand) forced the Thai Government to increase the defence budget and thereby reduce the funds available for general development. Furthermore, like other developing countries the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund ordered structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s with approximately the usual measures of cutting down on government expenditure. Loans in connection with the programmes were to enable Thailand to open the country "...more fully to international capital..." The success was limited, because "...powerful domestic and foreign interest groups..." objected to some of the recommendations from the World Bank (e.g. rise in energy prices and removal of tax on rice exports). However, Thailand managed to set up some 'home grown' structural adjustment

measures that should be seen in a regional South East Asian as well as in a global context (Ibid., p.30-40).

During the decade from 1985-1995 Thailand held the position as the world's fastest growing economy (Phongpaichit & Baker 1998:1)<sup>21</sup>. Phongpaichit & Baker provide a clear account of the economic development and export-led growth in Thailand. In the mid-1980s Japan and the four Asian Tigers: South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore had shown the way in this evolution, and Thailand became a part of the economic boom. "Form 1985 -1990, total exports from Thailand multiplied three times" (Ibid.,p.31). The single largest export sector, the garment industry, multiplied eleven times, and employed nearly one million people. The figure below shows how the industrial sector had overhauled the agricultural production in this decade:

**Figure 1: Export Categories in Thailand 1980-1996**



(Baker & Phongpaichit 1998:32)

and electronic production, and the demand for skilled human resources increased.

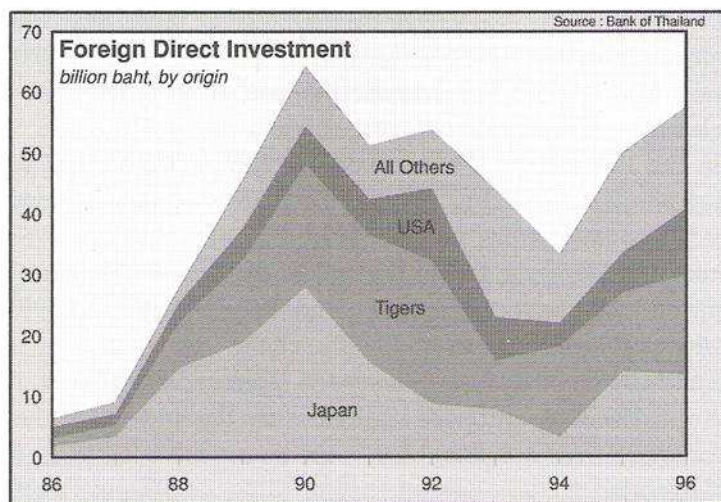
Foreign investments were burgeoning in Thailand, and as the investments grew the focus shifted from mainly joint-venture labour-intensive textile enterprises to medium-technology industries on a sub-contractual basis. The third step of out-sourcing or relocation of East Asian industries consisted of technology-intensive chemical

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<sup>21</sup> According to the World Bank the real average growth of GDP was 8.4 (Phongpaichit & Baker 1998 p.337)

**Figure 2: Foreign Direct Investment in Thailand 1986-1996**

Japan established assembly plants for its car industry, and soon South Korean car firms followed. The United States of America copied the ideas of sub-contracting the production of cars that were to be sold in the South East Asian region. The trans-national companies still play an important role in the Thai economy (Phongpaichit & Baker



(Baker & Phongpaichit 1998:36)

1998 p.28-38), that has been internationalised as well as the global division of labour has brought changes in the production systems (Parnwell & Arghiros in Parnwell 1996 p.10-11). These enterprises build on a labour force that can adapt to low and advanced technologies.

Influenced by the Western technocratic understanding of development, the first state plan (1961) reflected that development was synonymous with modernisation, and it was not until the formulation of the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1976-1981) that "...social issues were given some attention" (Schmidt in Parnwell 1996:69). In contrast to Somboon (Schmidt et al 1998:183), Schmidt claims that categorising Thailand as a newly industrialising country "...seems premature since about 70 per cent of the total labour force remains dependent on agriculture and in stagnation of rural poverty" (Schmidt in Parnwell 1996:79).

### Imbalances in the Thai Development Process

The Government's plans for development by means of capital-and technological-intensive industrialisation resulted in an uneven distribution of the benefits. The imbalances that followed after the financial crisis in 1997 have still left many people behind, and the causes should be sought in the past decades' development policies. The marginalised groups are to be found in the rural areas in hamlets and villages in the country's periphery as well as in the urban slums among squatter settlers and street-vendors. Apart from being economically poor, they have limited access to natural, social and political resources (Parnwell & Arghiros in Parnwell 1996 p.1-2).

The Government's concern for development expanding to rural areas should be seen in the fact that the rapid growth had failed to reach the poor in the regions, and the reasons are of different kinds. To redress the imbalances the Thai rural development policy was meant to "...direct national resources to rural areas and thereby increase the prosperity and productivity of these areas" (Hirsh 1990:16), but this rather one-dimensional suggestion of how to transfer resources takes the focus away from the real problems.

As in the Lao PDR the topography of the country shows big differences. Of the four regions (Map 3) in Thailand the Central Region is the wealthiest. The combination of the flat terrain, the fertile soil and the stable water supply creates the prerequisite for extended agricultural productivity. Consequently the income level is the highest in the country. Moreover, the capital Bangkok, the main domestic market and the centre of international trade, is situated in this region.

The Southern Region is the second most prosperous area. Its tropical climate and high rainfall is favourable especially for rubber production. Its plentiful mineral deposits and fisheries, and not least the flourishing tourist industry likewise contribute to the region's wealth.

The Northeastern Region is the poorest. The agricultural productivity is low because of infertile soil as well as longer periods of both drought and flooding make farming difficult. The result is very poor incomes.

In the Northern Region crop production is higher than in the Northeast as regular rainfall and rather extensive irrigation systems secure the people in this mountainous part of the country a better standard of living. However, together with the Northeast these two regions are still lagging behind in the Thai development process (Parnwell & Arghiros in Parnwell 1996 p.5-9).

As the Lao PDR has its east-west-axis with the richest section living in the west in the vicinity of the capital and the Mekong River as the prerequisite for prosperity, Thailand has its north-south divide with the Central and Southern region as the most affluent due to the proximity to national and international markets in and around Bangkok as well as these two regions have the advantage of a climate that is favourable for agricultural production.

According to Philip Hirsh the imbalances in the Thai development process can be viewed from a temporal and as well as from a spatial perspective. The temporal dimension of the process is synonymous with "...‘modernisation’, the movement from a backward to an advanced state" (Hirsh 1990:9). The spatial dimension of development "...is spoken of as ‘integration’,

‘linkage’ or ‘incorporation’ (Ibid.,p.9). In other words the rural areas, physically isolated from the centres “...implies backwardness, while proximity to the metropolitan core represents ... an implicit modernity” (Ibid.,p.9).

The spatial dimension of development is perhaps the most predominant of the interrelated factors that characterise the Thai development process. **Centralisation** can be said to be the root cause of the imbalances. The centralist Thai policy is a legacy from the 19<sup>th</sup> century where national unity was a priority in order to avoid colonisation (Parnwell & Arghiros in Parnwell 1996:8). The economic power elites, heavily benefiting from the growth, control the political process, not only in the urban centres, but they have close relations to the regional, economically dynamic elites. Both exercise **top-down strategies** claiming that the trickle-down effect will reduce the disparities over time. The centralist approach can also be seen as an explanation as to why there is very little interaction between the regional “growth poles” and the local rural sector (Ibid., p. 7). The intra-rural disparities expand to villages where powerful elites are able to exercise a certain control over “... state-initiated committees, associations, development projects etc.” (Ibid., p.15). They have therefore better access to e.g. loans, seeds and machineries (Ibid., p.15 and Hirsh 1990:27).

The above-mentioned examples of the hierarchical power-flow instigated by the centralist approach is thus both a historical fact and a conscious policy from the Thai Government’s openness to unfettered economic globalisation, that perpetuate and re-create the existing unevenness. The overall priorities are national security and economic growth which both affect the rural population (Hirsh 1990:10). Peter Bell agrees by referring to the Thai development policy as a sign of ‘maldevelopment’ which “...refers to a pattern of development with strongly negative socio-economic consequences in terms of inequality, unevenness, cultural fragmentation, and a negative impact on women and the environment” (Bell in Parnwell 1996:49). The term ‘development’ is not value-free but “...is in fact a highly ideological one” (Ibid.,p.50). The foreign, mainly American, influence in terms of advisors and technocrats promote the dominance of the Thai ruling capitalist classes, as well as export-oriented growth policy necessitates a transfer of capital from the agricultural sector to the urban industrial enterprises. Hence the inequality in income among the Thai population groups is widening (Ibid., p.50-51). The socio-economic consequences of this policy have led to “...the invasion and commercialisation of traditional cultures such as the hill-tribes” (Ibid.,p.58).

The Thai economic policy shapes the drawing up of the human resource policy and hence impacts on the planning for social, educational health and other development activities. The disparities in the economic and social development become evident with regard to disadvantaged groups like women and minorities.

### **Ethnic Minority Groups: a Challenge for the Thai Society**

The ethnic minority groups in Thailand constitute less than 2% of the total population of more than 60 million (Map 4). Thus in quantitative terms there is a significant difference to the demographic composition in the Lao PDR with an approximate minority group population of 50% (Map 5). However, this fact is no excuse for neglect and domination of the ethnic minority groups in any country.

Development programmes for ethnic minority groups, then referred to as hill tribes, began in Thailand as early as in 1935 with the establishment of a school in one village-policy (Chotichaipiboon in McCaskill & Kampe 1997:98). The Border Patrol Police was resident in the mountains, and in 1959 a Hill Tribe Committee was established as the first organisation at national level to deal with the ethnic minority groups. The United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) supported the first opium replacement programme in 1973. Following the establishment of the Office of Narcotics Control Board in 1977, other large-scale highland development projects were implemented. In the 1980s the World Bank followed by different foreign development agencies began their engagement in minority issues. Both foreign and national involvement was concentrated on administrative affairs (especially concerning Thai citizenship), eradication of opium cultivation and socio-economic development. In the late 1980s policy for minorities in the mountains included concern for the environment, in agreement with the shift in international development priorities. (Chandraprasert in McCaskill & Kampe 1997 p.83-87).

The Government policy <sup>22</sup> has had both positive and negative impact. Chandraprasert notices a certain success. The number of minority people registered as Thai citizens is increasing, education and health services have expanded as well as many groups have benefited from various training courses. External funding has made it possible for some communities to establish permanent watersheds which enable them to lead a better life without damaging the environment (Chandraprasert in McCaskill & Kampe 1997 p.89-90). However, the negative



impact outweighs the positive sides. The development policy has dire consequences for the socio-economic situation of the minority groups, it affects their cultural identity and not least the official attitude towards the minority groups still contributes to their lack of recognition as genuine Thai citizens.

The Government policy encourages the switch from subsistence economy based on a variety of crops and the farming practice on a rotational basis to a cash crop economy based on **mono-cropping**. The concentration on a single crop demands the use of both new technology, fertilizer and other chemicals. Apart from the disturbance of the ecological balance, the farmers have to borrow money to purchase tools and pesticides, and the debt often results in migration to urban areas where the lack of job opportunities entails social problems. The children are then often left in the villages without the attention from their parents and a generation gap is inevitable. Or the children follow their parents to the town where they are in danger of becoming beggars or prostitutes. The strong emphasis on opium eradication without a proper crop-substitution policy and process very often results in addiction to heroin which is an even bigger tragedy, as it has to be purchased.

Another economic blow to the people living in the mountains is the Government's emphasis on **tourism** as a means to acquire foreign exchange. The benefits for the ethnic people are very limited and environmental damage ensues as well. Villagers have to hand over farm land for the construction of sites for tourists, the felling of trees for new roads likewise puts a strain on the forest reserves, and the tourist payments for food and accommodation in the mountain villages are rarely given to the community.

The socio-cultural impact of the shift to the agri-business of mono-cropping, logging concessions and the tourist industry cause considerable negative effect on the cultural identity of the minority groups. A person who has migrated to the town is in danger of losing her/his identity and thus belonging nowhere. The family patterns have been broken with alienation as the result. The rampant eco-tourism might have the biggest negative consequences for women. Some tourists are looking for sexual services, and in some villages women are either "...willing, some are bought and sold, some are coerced" (Chotichaipiboon in McCaskill & Kampe 1997:107), and thus the girls and women are in danger of contracting AIDS. Especially women dresses among minority groups are colourful and some tourist organisations hire

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<sup>22</sup> According to Chotichaipiboon at least 11 ministries have been involved (in McCaskill & Kampe 1997:99)

women to perform ceremonies which are normally carried out by men. This can contribute to further ruptures in indigenous traditions. According to Chotichaipiboon “The objective of both organizer and the performers is money, not the dissemination of knowledge or the beauty of the practices” (Ibid.,p.108).

Chandraprasert and Chotichaipiboon do not deny that some improvement has occurred for the minority groups. However, the two researchers belonging respectively to a non-indigenous and an indigenous culture agree that the priority ascribed to the concept of development as economic growth as well as the attitude towards the minority groups have left the highland communities behind in the process for two reasons. First, Chotichaipiboon brings the attention to the difference in the way ‘development’ is defined by stating: “When ‘development’ aimed at helping the community through increased income entered the scene, both the development workers and the organizations behind them wanted visible results in a short time” when referring to the promotion of single cash crop (in McCaskill & Kampe 1997:105). Second, the attitude towards minority groups is negative, as Chandraprasert states that “They are thought to have a unique way of life, which poses a threat to the majority Thais” (Ibid.,p.88). Chotichaipiboon is even sharper in his analyses of the official integration policy: “Given the government’s existing negative attitude toward hill tribes, this adds further fuel to the fire stoked by a desire to assimilate them into Thai culture and make them *quality Thai citizens* [italics in the original]” (Ibid.,p.112).

### **The Thai-Lao Relation**

In the past there were impediments to such exchanges of experiences between the two countries. For centuries the relationship between Laos and Siam/Thailand was characterised by mutual distrust and hostility<sup>23</sup>. Thailand inflicted many hardships on ‘the little brother’ in terms of wars, exploitation and annexation of territories. Although direct conflicts over the past decade have been restricted to brief border strifes the relationship is in many ways still not unproblematic. However, there has been a shift from confrontation to co-existence after 1989 when Thailand “...encouraged by the waning of global cold war politics, and forcefully driven by reasons internal to Thailand...emphasized the more positive aspects of relations with Indochina” (Ngaosyvathn 1994:115). The visit to the Lao PDR by the Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan in 1988 “...constituted a political breakthrough in the relations between

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<sup>23</sup> The name “Thailand” was adopted in 1939 (Muang Thai = ‘land of the free’). For an extensive account of the history of the relationship between the two countries see Ngaosyvathn 1994.

the two countries” (Ibid., p.124). Likewise the Lao Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane cemented the new mutual respect and trust by declaring: “Mountains may collapse and rivers may run dry, but let the Lao-Thai friendship last forever” (The Nation, 18. February 1989 in Nagosyvatn 1994:125).

At present, despite differences in political ideology, economic performance<sup>24</sup> and social development<sup>25</sup> both governments see mutual gains in upholding good relations. Lao-Thai co-operation encompasses security issues along their common border, where joint patrols operate along the Mekong - still a delicate matter not least in connection with the repatriation of Lao refugees from camps in Thailand. However, the very liberal investment policy encompassed in the New Economic Mechanism has constituted the biggest incentive for increased co-operation. Thailand is the keystone in the foreign economic relations of the Lao PDR, and the Lao Government has welcomed Thai investments<sup>26</sup>. Financial co-operation has been crowned with the creation of a Thai-Lao joint development bank to streamline joint business ventures. Being rich in raw materials the Lao PDR exports coal, timber and hydropower to Thailand which represent the major hard currency earnings for the country (Ngaosyvatn 1994:120). A great number of the commodities available in the Lao PDR are imported from Thailand, which is also assisting the Lao PDR in terms of technology transfers – with some of the projects requested by the Lao Government. Lao officials and technicians are trained both in Thailand and in the Lao PDR (e.g. in agriculture and water resource engineering). The growing Lao industry is still on a low-technology basis, and the basic manufacture machinery imported from Thailand seems at first sight to be profitable for both countries.<sup>27</sup> However, the gains from an unequal relationship are bound to be uneven; Ivarsson et al. are right when they argue that “Today’s Laotians are in danger of being invaded by their big brothers in a new way, through trade, investments and the media...”, with the result that “There is a growing Thai-ification in the cultural sphere” (Ivarsson et al. 1995:27).

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<sup>24</sup> Despite the financial crash in 1997 and the ensuing economic recession Thailand is still more economically developed than the Lao PDR.

<sup>25</sup> Thailand is ranked number 66 (among ‘medium human development’ countries) out of 172 countries (UNDP: Human Development Report 2001)

<sup>26</sup> Total investment for the period from 1988 to the end of 1993 amounted US\$ 585 million from 28 different countries. More than a quarter of the total invested and more than a third of all projects were Thai. The investments have mostly been in the industrial and services sector, especially in textiles and tourism, but also in banking. (Stuart-Fox 1996:237)

<sup>27</sup> However, the thriving garment industry in for example Vientiane has serious social implications in terms of exploited labour and prostitution.

This notwithstanding, the growing Thai influence deriving from ties between the two countries should not be considered as exclusively negative. The two societies are closely linked by a common heritage as expressed by Sivaraksa: “Among all our neighbouring countries, Laos is closest to us, ethnically, religiously, linguistically and in life and death” (cited in Ngaosyvathn 1994:2). The origins of the Lao and Thai peoples are still vehemently debated among anthropologists, linguists and historians; but the common past is an incontestable legacy in the cultures of the two countries. 95% of the approximately 62 million people living in Thailand adhere to Theravada Buddhism (Parnwell 1996:20) and this is also the ‘official’ religion in the Lao PDR, mainly practised by the Lao Loum (‘lowland Lao’). The linguistic kinship is accentuated by the fact that nearly all Laotians<sup>28</sup> who have been to school understand and speak Thai (an ability that is maintained by means of the increased co-operation as well as via the media). The cultural similarities are obvious as are features of the development process characterised in the two countries by the same concentration of most energy around urban centres and an export oriented industrialisation (EOI). Paradoxically, the rapprochement between the two countries has led to the strengthening of the commonality between the Thais who have benefited from the economic boom and the dominant Lao Loum. They have more in common with each other than they have with their respective various ethnic, marginalised and excluded groups<sup>29</sup>.

This brings into focus the fact that the fast economic growth does not automatically erase socio-ethnic differences. The unevenness in the development process in the region is clearly expressed by Rigg: “Critics of the Southeast Asian growth experience have observed that the benefits of growth have accrued to particular groups in society and to particular regions. This has been expressed in class terms, in terms of rural-urban, and in terms of core and periphery, but the general implications are much the same: that inequalities have widened” (Rigg 2001:29). Some of the people in the two countries whose livelihoods are most affected in a negative manner by the rapid economic growth are the ethnic minority groups.

#### **1.4. Problem Formulation**

East Asia and South East Asia are economically “coming of age” according to a Western expression, and Hersh argues “...the next century will see a shift of the core of world capitalism

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<sup>28</sup> The term ‘Laotian’ refers to a citizen of the Lao PDR.

<sup>29</sup> According to Parnwell and Aghiros marginalised groups are also found “...in the hamlets, villages and small towns of the country’s [Thailand’s] periphery which are less accessible and far less attractive to the investors who

from the Atlantic to the Pacific” (in Schmidt et al.1998:23). Japan was the first locomotive, followed by the Five Tigers, and inevitably the ASEAN countries will follow, because despite the “...national and regional differences between the countries, they are part of the same dynamic process” (Ibid.,p.23). This also brings the Lao PDR into focus. Because of its geographical position, the Lao economy has always been dependent on relations with its neighbours.

The Lao PDR is trying to find its own feet in the new South East Asian context, maintaining close ideological bonds to China and Vietnam, while at the same time engaging in a growing regional, capitalist economy. Thus the Lao government has to deal with at least two big interrelated challenges:

The creation of the ‘*new industrial man*’, a technically qualified labour force to fulfil the requirements of a rapidly changing society towards industrialisation has contributed to a greater polarisation of the Lao society. The development of human resources is in principle highly prioritised by the Lao government. Due to the country’s economic dependence on foreign aid (mostly from capitalist countries, including Thailand) and loans as well as the commitment to the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) renders a return to socialist plan economy most improbable. The Lao PDR has also adopted the western concept of ‘human resource development’. Thai assistance to the Lao PDR aims at “...promoting Laos’ market economy formation and social development by introducing new technology and human resource training” (Iinuma 2002:171). In theory the human development paradigm is prevalent as the actual mainstream paradigm focusing on the enlargement of people’s choices. However, the western and capitalist human resource planning still reflects the neo-liberal growth paradigms emphasising the economic value of human beings; the term ‘resource’ suggests that people are considered as a form of capital, parallel to financial and physical capital, in the service of production.<sup>30</sup>

As a consequence, training courses comprise a vital component of the Lao human resource development programmes. The courses are mainly planned for people who have received primary and some secondary education, who are already part of the labour force and who hold

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have fuelled Thailand’s economic boom. Glimpses are also to be found among the slums and squatter settlements, the scavengers and street-vendors of the capital city” (1996:1)

<sup>30</sup> Human Development and Human Resource Development are different, yet interrelated, concepts. The differences will be object for discussion in chapter 2.

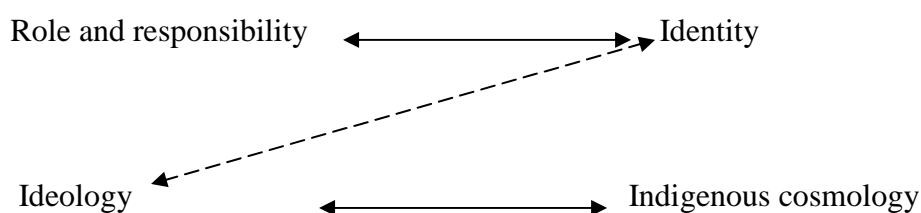
or are adopting modern values, which again stress the focus on training especially for the urban population in the new capacity building policy. Another aspect of the programmes is the training of the local ethnic leaders, a training that could be seen as having ideological overtones. This leaves most indigenous peoples without great possibilities of influence on their own development. Firstly, because they might have different understandings of what human development means for the preservation of their culture and livelihood, and, secondly, because they are not asked about how the programmes can be adjusted, planned and implemented in order for them to be part of the modernising world, while preserving their culture.

At the same time as creating the new industrial man, another question will therefore inevitably follow in the wake of the engagement with the regional and global economy. The country is in need of shaping a culturally new man who can still convey the Marxist-Leninist ideology to counteract the western(ised) influences. Will a new economic policy only impose new roles and responsibilities on the population as a whole, or will the changed economic environment also lead to a different socio-cultural identity for the ethnic minority people?

The *roles* of the indigenous peoples will inevitably change and be defined by others than themselves in the name of modernisation. The *responsibilities* are understood as individual responsibilities seen in connection with new social patterns constructed to match the new socio-economic conditions and imposed on the ethnic minority groups from outside by development planners and policy makers in their efforts to reshape the nation's image. It appears that the ethnic people primarily see themselves as not belonging to a 'nation state', but as members of a particular language group, with their own history, traditions and myths. It also seems that their identity mainly is based on cultural values, so the 'new industrial, socialist and cultural man' can have no significant meaning in the ethnic people's self-understanding - or it can be interpreted as an effort to denigrate the indigenous culture. As culture is an inherent part of a person's understanding of himself as a human being, indigenous peoples consider themselves as having a collective and not an individual identity. That 'identification' is a social act as much as it is private and psychological, becomes very obvious when 'social' is defined as 'belonging to a group', and not defined in 'socio-economic terms'. Thus one could argue for a new social role that is changeable in relation to new economic conditions; but it is questionable, whether you can change an innate cultural *identity* for any person – or it might be possible by alienation and systematic inculcation of other values, norms and socio-economic patterns.

The other dichotomy is not a question of social roles and responsibilities, but that of the *ideological* versus the *non-ideological* interpretation of identity and people's self-understanding. The creation of a culturally new man is closely linked to the political power of the communist regime and defined in an ideological sense. There is, however, a transverse, internal parallel between 'ideology' on the one hand and 'identity' on the other. A communist can hardly identify himself as a human being without referring to his status as a political man with a collective consciousness. Therein lies the difference between a political versus a cultural understanding of the word 'collective'. Where the modern, political man derives his *raison d'être* from his political affiliation, the non-ideologised minority man derives his from the *cosmological* belief of his group. Especially the cultural heterogeneity of the population in the Lao PDR could therefore be considered as the biggest obstacle in the modernisation process.

Without going deeper into various identity theories, one could look at this question as a double dichotomy:



Seen in this perspective the “laoloumification”, the homogenisation, of the population is a vital instrument in the attempt of forging a “new man”. A suitable space for the increased ideological/political control is the school – and not least the attempt to make boarding schools<sup>31</sup> for ethnic minority groups a success. Given the demographic, geographical and infrastructural conditions of the Lao PDR the establishment of boarding schools seems a reasonable solution as a transitional stage. It is an active commitment to remove educational disparities, a desire to make education accessible for all. However, the philosophy reflected in the school curriculum, and not least perceptible in boarding schools, might also be the most significant example to mirror ideological overtones. A government official in the Ministry of Education gave this answer when asked the question why minority children should be sent to boarding schools:

“...pour qu'ils aient du contact avec la civilisation”.

(Kanstrup-Jensen 1996:46)

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<sup>31</sup> The establishment of boarding schools is an idea adopted from Vietnam, and in some cases still economically supported by Vietnam.



This statement denigrates minority groups as non-civilised people by implying that the lowlanders, the Lao Loum, represent *the* civilisation, and that the goal is “laouloumification” of the ethnic minority groups. The official adheres to the mantra that the only navigable way to development and modernity for a country as culturally diverse as the Lao PDR is homogenisation of the entire population. Hutchinson points out that there are two ways forward: to homogenise the different cultures in the countries in the name of national development or “...to reduce ethnicity to the folkloristic margins of society” (1996:21).

A Hmong<sup>32</sup> official in the Ministry of Education seems to be fully aware of the two options to surmount the dichotomy for ethnic groups by stating:

“ ...il ne faut pas les laisser dans des musées”

(Kanstrup-Jensen 1996:46)

He showed a differentiated and reflective point of view concerning the future of the ethnic minority groups involved as they are in a rapid evolutionary process. Furthermore he stressed that it is essential to nurture a sense of commitment to preserve their cultural heritage and their identity as indigenous peoples in order to enable them to analyse their own situation in modernising Lao society. However, the dilemma is that, in the name of modernisation, the ethnic minority groups are hardly given a chance to find their own way of modernising, and marginalisation is consequently widening. On the other hand, one could argue that letting the ethnic minority groups find their own path would increase the marginalisation even more seen in the actual political climate, and that assimilation and homogenisation after all might turn out to be the lesser evil.

However, Dharam Ghai claims that “...experience has shown that attempts at nation building through homogenization cannot succeed” (Dharam Ghai in UNRISD 1995:29). Thus it would seem that the Lao attempt to shape a *new modern man* in connection with the changed economic situation might have few chances of being successful. It is a widespread assumption that ethnicity represents an obstacle to development, but advocates for ‘ethnodevelopment’, a development within a framework of cultural pluralism, will “...bring out the potential of different ethnic groups” (Hettne 1990:190).

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<sup>32</sup> It is significant that the official interviewed wanted to be anonymous

The potential inherent in indigenous cultures is not likely to be nurtured and strengthened in the way the human resource development programmes in the Lao PDR are planned and implemented. Nor are the national school curriculum and the formal education system conducive to making the ethnic minority groups valuable contributors to the modernisation process and national capacity building while at the same time guarantee their right to self-development.

As a point of comparison the ethnic minority groups in Thailand share the same conditions as the groups in the Lao PDR in terms of socio-economic marginalisation and assimilationist pressure from the dominant majority. Although Thailand has a small percentage and the Lao PDR a large percentage of indigenous peoples both governments tend to denigrate indigenous conceptualisations which can be considered as a violation of the human rights conventions that both countries are signatories to.

Half of the data in the field research are collected among some Hmong and Akha groups in Thailand, and Lao educators might find it worthwhile to review the positive and negative aspects of the experiences and innovative education endeavours, and consider to adapt some portions into a Lao context.

Regardless of the greater political room for manoeuvre in the moderately developed Thailand that might serve as inspiration for progressive forces in the Lao PDR, the development that is taking place in the two countries in favour of ethnic “majority” cultures might be connected to the power of western(ised) definitions and implementation of human development policies. This contributes to further marginalisation of the indigenous population groups.

Therefore it is important to investigate other interpretations of education and human development rather than simply as quantifiable terms in the service of the growing industrialisation after the Western model which is being increasingly adopted by several countries in the South East Asian region.

*Thus the imperative questions to explore are:*

- a) What are the educational practices and concepts as well as expectations among selected Akha and Hmong groups in the Northern provinces of the two countries. Which kind of education do they see as most meaningful, if they 1) want to be part of a modernising world 2) would rather retain their indigenous way of life or 3) see some combination of indigenous and “modern” education as appropriate for their own development in a changing world.*
- b) On the basis of the research findings to which extent can Western-originated development paradigms be applied to heterogeneous societies in developing countries.*

## CHAPTER 2: THE HEGEMONY OF THE WESTERN<sup>33</sup> DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE<sup>34</sup>

The concept of human development – sometimes confused with “human resource development”- is an invention of Western development agencies and organisations most often used to describe training courses and activities that are planned for e.g. villagers in developing countries. However, the notion is non-existent in the languages of many indigenous peoples as well as the conceptualisation of human development is different. For some indigenous population groups in South East Asia the concept means: “to become a human being”, “knowledge” and “learning”. This clash of conceptualisations represents a constraint in nurturing capability formation of indigenous communities because of the dichotomy between Western paradigms and indigenous epistemology.<sup>35</sup>

The emergence of cultural studies in sociology has revealed the extent to which culture is implicated in all human social activity, but one very central dimension that has been neglected is that of values expressed through culture. Development itself is primarily about values: If development should promote equality it is not only a technical economic question, but it involves political and moral decisions. The nexus of values and development is highly dependent on national ideological agendas which most often do not provide space for cultural assertion and spiritual welfare for indigenous communities.

National capacity building strategies rely on human beings as capital. The acquisition of education and skills are “indirect” values that are essential for functioning and inclusion in economic and political life. The “direct” values acquired through education should make

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<sup>33</sup> After the economic ascent of Japan, the ‘West’ might no longer be the most appropriate term, but Serge Latouche states: “In contemporary geopolitics the ‘Western world’ refers to the triangle containing the northern hemisphere: Western Europe, Japan and the United States” (Latouche 1996:27). It might be appropriate to add Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>34</sup> The concept of ‘discourse’ in the research study will be understood in the sense of given to it by Jim George as “...not synonymous with language as such. It refers rather to a broader matrix of social practices that gives meaning to the way that people understand themselves and their behaviour. A discourse, in this sense, generates the categories of meaning by which reality can be understood and explained. More precisely, a discourse makes “real” that which it prescribes as meaningful”...“The process of discursive representation is never a neutral, detached one but is always imbued with the power and authority of the names and makers of reality...” (George, Jim: 1994:29-30)

<sup>35</sup> Pointing at the Western hegemony here shall not, however, disregard the positive effect that Western involvement can have on “human development” and education in the Third World countries. This subject will be treated in chapter 5.

people able to lead the lives they have reason to value, and to enable them to choose. Capability formation among indigenous communities is therefore among other things a question of whether education should reproduce the dominant culture or enrich and cultivate human potential. The dilemma can be epitomized in the question of how a meaningful education for the indigenous peoples to take part in a modernising process can be created while preserving fundamental elements of their cultural heritage.

The first part of this chapter offers a reflection on the different manifestations of Western dominance in the development discourse. The equation of education with schooling mirrors the ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism legitimised by paradigms rooted in Western theoretical traditions. The difference between the formation of “human capital” versus “human capabilities” is seen in relation to the human development paradigm as well as its consequences in relation to indigenous populations. In general the section argues that researchers, policy makers and development practitioners rarely contest the assumed universalism of Western definitions and interpretations.

The second part continues the discussion of universality with regards to “rights” and education as synonymous with Western understanding of the concepts. The post-Cold War focus on human rights has brought along a series of conventions and declarations concerning the rights of the individual. The language used in the declarations on the right to education in 1990 and the follow up in 2000 changed in a direction of paying greater attention to vulnerable groups in society. However, the new rhetoric has not in reality opened up for any concrete recognition of other ways of understanding education than the Western conceptualisation. One could express the hope that the past decade’s increased attention to cultural rights and the rights of indigenous peoples might lead to enhanced understanding and acceptance of the value of indigenous education practices and concepts.

### **2.1. The Power of Paradigms**

The symbolic presence of the West in Third World countries after de-colonisation is still influenced, if not dominated, by Western ideologies and doctrines. The *essence* of colonial Europe expressed itself in philosophy (Enlightenment), religion (Christianity), race (the white man) and economic system (capitalism) (Latouche 1996:25-26). Naturally this is an incomplete analysis of the Western civilisation as an entity in all aspects, and historically Western supremacy has been challenged, but so far without great success.

Consequently, many development activities in Third World countries are presented as clear demonstrations for the glorification of Western science and technology, as well as of Western economic politics and culture as the incontestable “values of progress” (Ibid., p.17). The adaptation and implementation of Western lifestyles and material priorities have damaging effects on indigenous population groups like in the Lao PDR and Thailand despite the two countries’ different paths to modernity and means of development. Latouche expresses the unevenness very clearly:”...those-and they are numerous-who are excluded from the material and symbolic benefits of ‘modernisation’ can and must, if they are to survive as a species and as human beings, find fresh solutions” (Ibid., p.4).

### **2.1.1. The Dichotomy between Western Paradigms and Indigenous Epistemology**

It can be assumed that also many indigenous peoples want changes and modernisation, but one could fear that they will not be given the opportunity to find their own solutions in the political environment that both includes and excludes them. human development and education are some of the most fundamental instruments to modernisation, but for ideological and political as well as for cultural reasons there can be discrepancies in the interpretation of the concepts.

One of the fundamental characteristics of human history is that people in all social arrangements have educated their children (Reagan 1996: ix). Knowledge has been passed on from one generation to the next not only to ensure survival, but also to preserve the respective cultures. However, most established literature, courses and conferences dealing with the history and philosophy of education include few, if any, references to indigenous educational ideas and practices. Although there have been attempts to include the perspectives of minority/marginalised groups in the studies of education it is rarely acknowledged that valuable insight might be gained from serious examination of non-Western experiences themselves. This is an important shortcoming as ”...these traditions might be fully and in all respect comparable to the Western tradition in their unique richness and diversity” (Ibid.,p.1).

The methodological problem in most current research, not only of indigenous educational ideas and practices, is related to the reification and delegitimisation approaches. Even well-intentioned scholars are prone to reify the object of their studies – and thereby making it fundamentally alien to its reality. Reification creates confusion and misinterpretation of the phenomenon, as well as subjugating the phenomenon to the researcher’s own values and norms. The tendency in the study of educational thought and practices is rooted in the Western

modernisation tradition. The issue is the way education is conceptualised, whereby alternative educational systems especially found in the Third World are delegitimised and deemed primitive, uncivilised or irrational by researchers influenced by this tradition. According to Mathur, Johan Galtung epitomises this "...when he says that the West is not even aware of alternative forms of rationality because of its success in destroying other cultures" (cited in Mathur 1989:471). It is most difficult to avoid the dilemma created by the strait-jacket of Western dominance, and as Sardar writes, this is due to the fact that the real power of the West lies "in its power to define" (Sardar in Munck & O'Hearn 1999:44).

The view of one's own culture as superior to others, referred to as *cultural ethnocentrism*, prevails in most, if not all societies. In practice, however, this translates in simply measuring and evaluating foreign phenomena using one's own socio-cultural norms. This is an issue that has been raised by post-modern critical theory in the past decades. "Indigenous populations had to be 'modernized', where modernisation meant the adoption of the 'right' values, namely those held by the white minority, and in general, those [values] embodied in the ideal of the cultivated European;" (Escobar 1995:43). As a consequence of basic assumptions, cultural ethnocentrism manifests itself from the very beginning in the themes and topics that many Western scholars choose to explore, the questions they intend to ask, the way the hypotheses are constructed, and they are often affected, though often unconsciously, by idiosyncratic biases. The new awareness has been slowly penetrating research production as well as attempting a redefinition of development. According to Tucker "the problems of how to engage in a dialogue of equals with Others in a world saturated with Western hegemony have only begun to impose themselves on the concern of Western social science. These problems are nowhere posed more sharply than when we consider the predicament of indigenous peoples" (Tucker in Munck & O'Hearn 1999:19).

However, seen in the context of the assumed binary opposition between modernisation and tradition, cultural ethnocentrism does not necessarily only reflect Western capitalist hegemony. Internal cultural imperialism prevails in any political system, as "...formal schooling is both determined by and a determinant of the political system" (Fägerlind & Saha 1985:123). Education, especially as related to nation-building, can be seen as serving three main purposes:"1) as the main agent for political socialisation of the young into the national political culture, 2) as the primary agent for the selection and training of political elites, and 3) as the main contributor to political integration and the building of national political consciousness"



(ibid.:125). Education prepares children for citizenship in a particular political context, inculcating the civic values that are prevalent elements in a particular political ideology. In other words education can be conceptualised as an attempt to maintain the political status quo and homogenise the population. The problem in many Third World countries is that this official indoctrination may conflict with indigenous values taught in their cultures.

The emphasis on modernisation of science and knowledge leads to a second kind of ethnocentrism, *epistemological ethnocentrism*. It is not so much related to individual assumptions and biases, as to conventional suppositions that are common to an entire domain of study. This kind of ethnocentrism expresses itself in paradigmatic constructions:

“A paradigm is a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world. As such, paradigms are deeply embedded in the socialization of adherents and practitioners: paradigms tell them what is important, legitimate and reasonable. Paradigms are also normative, telling the practitioner what to do without the necessity of long existential or epistemological consideration. But it is this aspect of paradigms that constitutes both their strength and weakness – their strength in that it makes action possible, their weakness in that the very reason for action is hidden in the unquestioned assumptions of the paradigm”

(Patton, 1978 p.203 cited in Lincoln & Guba 1985:15)

The above definition is drawn from Thomas Kuhn’s research on the role of paradigms in scientific research. “These [paradigms] I take to be universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners” (Kuhn 1996: x). “Universally” must be interpreted as “Western” as it is seen in most conventions and declarations. Thus the dominant paradigm in a field of study during a given historical period establishes the parameters within which accepted research is allowed. Researchers, students and development practitioners usually do not question the relevance and the legitimacy of an accepted paradigm, nor do bureaucrats or teachers. In accordance with this internalised knowledge foundation they form a “scientific community” and “...define the kinds of problems to be investigated, the kinds of assumptions and concepts to be employed, and the kind of research methods to be used” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 1996:17). In the context of indigenous educational practices the object of research has for many years been reduced to the study of “socialisation” carried out by e.g. sociologists as well as of the “acculturation” phase referred to by many anthropologists.

The critique that can be raised at the modernisation approach is that scholars belonging to that school have tended to equate education with “formal schooling”. One reason being, according to adherents of this paradigm, that education “...generally is more strongly directed to some segments of the population, for example urban youth from higher status backgrounds” (Fägerlind & Saha 1989:52). From the beginning the conceptualisation of the process of modernisation and development was modelled on the experience of the advanced capitalist nations. An example is UNESCO’s Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) in the 1970s, which was mainly concerned with “...inserting or adapting the new literate to capitalist social relations rather than raising the critical awareness of his role and position in society” (Mbilinyi et al. 1982:57). Another objective of the programme was the intention of making the new literates ‘masters of milieu’, meaning adapting them to modern behaviour at work and introducing them to modern technology. However, a self-critical report from UNESCO raised the following questions on this kind of ‘mastery of milieu’: “To what extent has the new literate become dependent on which external socio-economic processes and forces? Has literacy enabled the new literate to know and understand these processes and forces? To come to grips with them? To have a voice in controlling them?” (Ibid., p.57).

This present study does by no means contest the objective of the eradication of illiteracy, but only questions whether paradigms developed in a Western context automatically are the most appropriate for planning education and human development for indigenous peoples. A critical approach asserts that paradigms assuming that people hold modern attitudes, values and beliefs about e.g. work, quality of life and control of one’s environment are inappropriate in dealing with indigenous peoples. The idea of education as linked to an institution that teaches children in certain age groups a fixed curriculum at specific times often alienates children from their cultural background in which education/learning is considered as a “womb-to-tomb” process. The focus on “modern” literacy and a literary tradition has entailed that many interesting and important aspects of the indigenous concept of education have been considered as falling outside the parameters of “legitimate” research framework.

Equipped with well-defined Western paradigms, the researcher thus appears to be academically invulnerable. It also entails that s/he is reluctant to recognise that the boundaries for her/his expectations might be changed, and thereby s/he will be forced to accept that previous assumptions concerning the conceptualisation of education are insufficient. Most of the

existing writings within the field of indigenous education “...were in disarray in that they did not reflect any conscious trend or the ‘true state of the art’” (Ocitti 1994:5).

Cultural ethnocentrism has a tendency to present indigenous education systems as “underdeveloped” and “traditional” and without dynamics. The epistemological ethnocentrism that equates education with “schooling” is a distortion of proven usefulness in Third World countries. In fact “...indigenous knowledge is threatened by inadequate, inaccurate and inappropriate conceptions of knowledge and the propagation of these conceptions throughout educational practice” (Kroma 1995:13). New approaches and re-conceptualisations are needed. It is time to begin to challenge the dominant paradigm in this field, as an increasing number of researchers are already questioning mainstream educational research and replacing it with alternative approaches.

However, the so-called alternative strategies are still mainly conceived by Western(ised) development thinkers, although some slowly have begun to recognise the cultural heterogeneity in the Third World and the challenges it can cause for mainstreaming development efforts. Pieterse points to the fact that a state in its reconstruction towards modernisation has “a multicultural foundation”, and “Cultural heterogeneity is a source of creativity and dynamism and arguably the ultimate source of economic growth and human betterment” (Pieterse 2000:199).

### **2.1.2. The Challenge of External Cultures and Values**

Culture and values are inextricably amalgamated in all societal configurations and form the cement that holds them together. The focus of the dissertation is not on culture *per se*, but among the innumerable meanings of the concept the following definition seems appropriate for this study: “...a shared set of institutions, values, symbols, and social relationships which gives any social group its identity and distinguishes it from other similar groups” (Stavenhagen 1985:12). One of many examples from the researched villages supports this definition: “Our culture is the dress and the language, and we must perform the ceremonies”<sup>36</sup>. This again does not prevent this particular person from adhering to more than one culture.

Related to the structures of a society are the distinctive patterns and norms. Thus values should be understood as socially constructed and not as neutral; besides, they are dynamic and a significant feature of power relations in all cultures. They can be “...embodied in and expressed through religion, cultural practices, social organisation, political ideologies,

psychological structures, conceptions of human needs, quality of life and human rights” (Clammer 1996:30).

The conflict here is between the culture and values of most international and bilateral organisations and national governments, the “developers” (i.e. so-called professional development workers at any level and of any nationality), on the one side and the culture and values of the “developees” e.g. indigenous peoples on the other. All organisations have their own culture and values that are influenced by the prevailing parameters in development frameworks and in accordance to which they must act just as the “target population”<sup>37</sup> e.g. indigenous peoples “...must function within the limits of their own cultures” (Kampe (b) 1997:133). Education programmes among indigenous populations are often standard replication of programmes that are implemented regardless of geographical, social and cultural context. This “one-size-fits all” mentality is not limited to official, international organisations. Even many well-meaning NGOs do not take the heterogeneity of the different indigenous cultures into account, let alone the insufficient knowledge by both international and national “developers” concerning the indigenous education resources. Ignorance of the values, beliefs and practices of indigenous communities makes many educational activities fail. As Kampe expresses it: “The point is that perhaps we don’t understand, except at the shallowest levels, the people whose lives we are altering. And because of this, there are definite and negative repercussions on their culture and their lives” (Ibid., p.140).

The recognition of diversity in societal formations should however not be carried to extremes. Education is an inherent part of any indigenous culture and in spite of the differences among indigenous cultures all over the world there are common features, as well as practices which follow approximately the same pattern. The main characteristic of this kind of education is that it is based on a tradition of learning for life, neither confined to a schoolroom, fixed curriculum nor to a timetable, and not ending with exams showing academic results. The ultimate goal of indigenous education/learning is to integrate the individual into her/his community. The organisation of indigenous education is divided into a vertical time cycle following the different age groups. The learning in this cycle prepares the person to assume responsibilities according to her/his age and status in the “rites of passage”. Along with the vertical cycle of

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<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Ziupah Tiupah (69), Ban Mae Chan Tai, Thailand, 2000 p. 29

<sup>37</sup> Kampe claims that the term “...reveals a know-it-all and insensitive side to traditional development thinking. A target is something you focus on from outside, not the inside, and thus there is no need to really comprehend the target”. (Kampe (b) 1997:139)

learning indigenous peoples follow an organised horizontal learning process. The educators are the near family, extended family, the community and the external environment where there are no family ties (Ocitti, 1994:21-30)<sup>38</sup>. The learning themes and topics in the two cycles are of a practical, social, moral and spiritual character. The following quotation describing the Hmong (South East Asia) culture can illustrate the all -encompassing nature of indigenous learning culture:

” Cet enseignement traditionnel est essentiellement utilitaire et utilisable, et ne tombe pas dans les ridicules anomalies que rencontre certain enseignement moderne...on trouve chez les Hmong des maîtres, experts en matière d’armurerie, de musique et de médecine traditionnelle, qui transmettent aux descendants leurs connaissances et leurs techniques.

A côté des maîtres reconnus comme tels, il faut aussi placer les chanteurs qui entretiennent et renouvellent une littérature orale sans cesse enrichissante, et leurs conteurs par qui les foules apprennent l’histoire, la géographie, la mythologie, bien des éléments des sciences naturelles et une foule d’autres encore; on retient et on répète à l’infini ce qu’ils ont raconté – et l’on tire les conclusions morales et autres, qui s’imposent”

(Yang Dao 1975:118)

The failure to appreciate the value of indigenous education practices and to build upon them is detrimental to the capability formation among indigenous communities. The consequences of sending children to school are well-known in terms of e.g. high opportunity costs for the parents (especially where girls are concerned), high drop-out rates because of a foreign teaching language, inappropriate curriculum and inadequately trained, culturally insensitive teachers. The challenge is to create an education model that takes existing resources into account, an education that is meaningful for indigenous peoples, an education that will empower individuals and make them able to choose and thereby “... become full members of the society with some control over their destiny” (Griffin & Knight 1989:10).

Education is a dynamic constituent of any culture, but generally speaking modernisation processes unavoidably result in transformation if not conversion of national values. Latouche goes so far as to claim: ”The introduction of Western values – science, technology, economics, development, mastery of nature – are the bases of deculturation” (Latouche 1996:55). Mehmet agrees that education is a powerful weapon in the hands of Western development theorists. He claims that non-Western concepts are ignored “...while a myth of superiority of individualism

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<sup>38</sup> This topic will be treated in chapter 5

has been created through education, justifying biased Western paradigms promising prosperity via economic growth” (Mehmet 1999:9). The influence of Western values and principles on national values in Third World countries become even more complex in regions with various and often conflicting cultures within the same national boundaries. In very heterogeneous societies the cultures of indigenous populations are indeed in great danger of disappearing because of the “double” pressure.

In the modernisation context of South East Asia education is also about preserving the culture, and most indigenous cultures – if not all – are victims of assimilationist pressures from the nation-building policy. An example from the Lao PDR, where at least 45.7% of the total population belongs to various minority groups, Kampe argues that the national education programme is repressing instead of liberating the indigenous peoples (McCaskill & Kampe 1997:7-8). The former president, Mr. Kaysone Phomvihane expressed the dominance of the Lao Loum, the “majority” group (app. half of the population), by saying that they have “the highest culture”. “Therefore the Lao culture must be the basic culture” (Evans 1999:171). In terms of nation-building in developing countries “Governments have it within their power to promote the enhancement of human capabilities by means of their education, health, nutrition, participation and other policies”(Griffin & Knight 1989:12). But for a communist country like the Lao PDR two socialisation factors are emphasised: the “forging of the new socialist man” and the “cultural revolution” (Evans 1995:1-2). The new socialist man is projected to replace the values “of the old society” (Ibid., p.2) There is no doubt that this targets not only the former royal government (abolished after the communist seizure of power in 1975), but also the values of the minority cultures in the mountains. The New Economic Mechanism demands a docile and adaptive workforce. The Lao PDR is an excellent example of how national education is used by the party-state as a tool for homogenising the population and maintaining the political status quo.

As a reaction to this outside pressure and denigration of their values and beliefs, some indigenous communities make great efforts to adapt to the needs of a world in transformation while still preserving their own culture. They are fully aware of the risk of being left in some kind of folkloristic museums. Governments are very often interested in the colourful culture of indigenous peoples (i.e. songs, dances and dresses), as a source of income through tourism, one could speak of a commodification of culture, whereas the Government seems little interested in the people themselves. An example of an initiative from the indigenous peoples in South East Asia is the establishment of the Akha Association. The organisation discusses with

and offers advice to the individual communities on both how to interpret and respond to new regulations from the respective governments and concerning which ceremonies and customary laws to alter in order to e.g. prevent the young Akha people from leaving their communities.

In order to provide cultural assertion and spiritual welfare for indigenous peoples, while at the same time have them contribute to national development, dynamic, political action from the indigenous peoples's own organisations as well as policy strategies at national level are needed. In this process the development of all existing human resources is crucial, and in principle the human development paradigm seems to offer the appropriate framework.

However, the semantics of the development wording as well as its normative aspect have become issues of increasing interest and debate among some development theorists and researchers and to some extent among development practitioners. Thus the question is what human development means, as well as who has the right to define it.

### **2.1.3. Constraints on Capability Formation among Indigenous Communities**

The reorientation in the development discourse of the Third World that emerged with the human development paradigm, was intended "...to escape the tyranny of GNP" as expressed by Gilber Rist: " 'Human' was therefore a timely epithet which gave the impression that something new was happening under the sun of 'development'" (Rist 1997:205). Nevertheless, although the *Zeitgeist* since the 1970s has focused on the normative dimension and pretended to place people at the centre stage of the development process, it can be argued that the paradigm still is interpreted from an economic<sup>39</sup> point of view. Both the concept of *human capital* and *human resource development* seems in many cases to consider human beings as means to increase income and wealth rather than as an end in themselves<sup>40</sup>. Although economic growth is an indispensable component in poverty alleviation and development, it is only one among other components. Experiences show that an expansion of GNP does not necessarily entail enhancement in the quality of human lives. However, the significance of human development as a means as well as an end should not be denied, because people play a dual role. "Human beings are agents, beneficiaries and adjudicators of progress, but they also happen to be - directly or indirectly - the primary means of all production". (Sen 1989:41) The

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<sup>39</sup> Economism understood as an exaggerated focus on economics as determinant of a society's development parameter

<sup>40</sup> The human capital theory was introduced by Theodore Schultz in 1960 in a presentation to the American Economic Association: "Investment in Human Capital", later published in the *American Economic Review*, 51(January 1961),17 ( Perkins et al. 2001:319)

*human welfare* approach considers human beings as beneficiaries rather than participants in the development process. Finally, human development differs from the *basic needs* approach because this latter strategy focuses on the provision of goods and services rather on than their implications for human choices.

The intention, here, is to consider the aspect of human fulfilment in terms of whether people have the required education to be complete members of society with some control over their destiny as argued by Griffin & Knight. Sen discusses two perspectives that are different but interrelated, and highly relevant in the discourse on indigenous peoples's choices and opportunities in the development process. As mentioned above people play a dual role in all societies, and education can equally be said to have two purposes. The concept of Human capabilities relates to "what people actually are able to do or to be" (Nussbaum 2000 (a): 222) and "focuses on the ability to lead lives that they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have" (Sen 1997:1959). Human capital on the other hand is concentrated on "the agency of human beings – through skills and knowledge as well as effort – in augmenting production possibilities" (Ibid.,p.1959). In both perspectives human beings are at the centre of attention, and all people value being healthy and having acquired some skills/education. The reason for valuation can be *direct* or *indirect*. In relation to the two approaches the discussion can be said to have four components:

1. According to the human capital approach a formally educated and healthy person contributes more to production than an uneducated and non-skilled person. Sen claims that when people are considered as capital in line with physical capital, education represents an *indirect* value.
2. In addition to its role in the service of production the *direct* value of education lies – according to the human capability approach - in the benefit a person might have in terms of more self-confidence, better ability to communicate, being taken more seriously etc. This approach thus encompasses the two benefits of education.
3. However, because of the close relationship between the human capital and human capability approach one could argue that education in regarding human beings as capital can represent *both an indirect and a direct value*: "If a person can become more productive in making commodities through better education, better health and so on, it is not unnatural



to expect that s/he can also directly achieve more – and have more freedom to achieve more – in leading her life” (Ibid.,p.1959). It could seem as if the human capital approach has ‘monopolised’ both the direct and the indirect value of education.

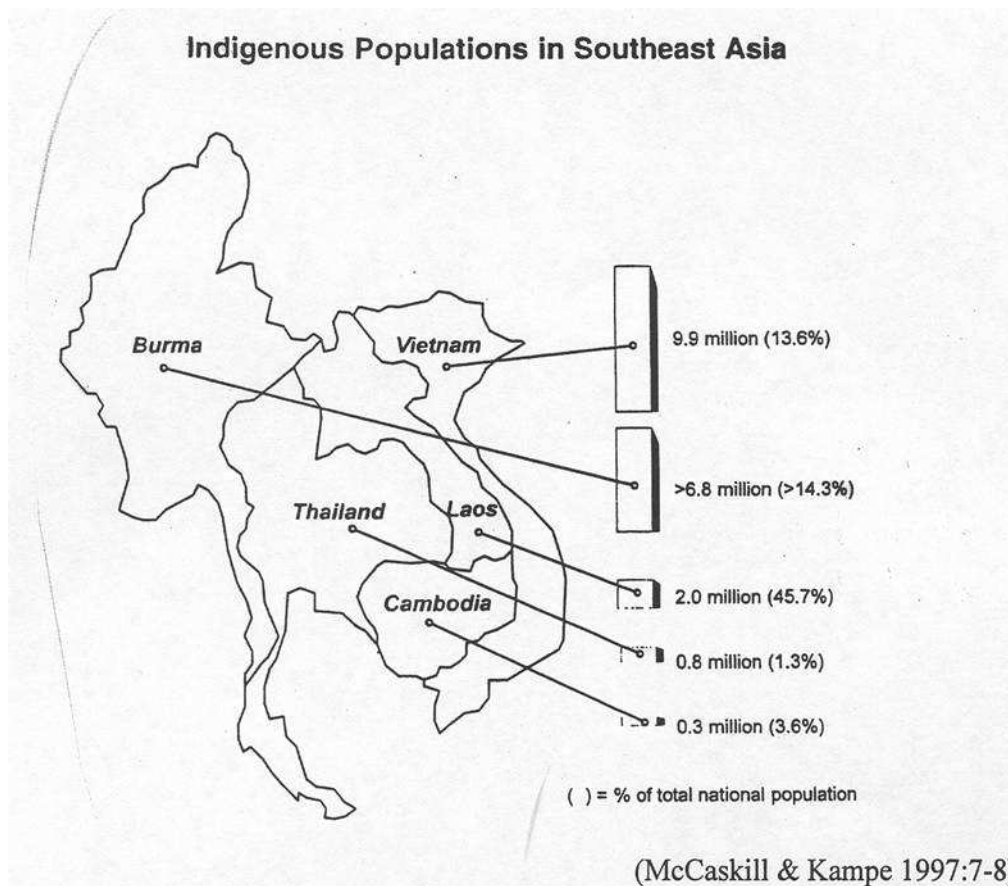
4. However central the connection between the two approaches seems to be, they are *not alternatives*, and there is a clear distinction between means and ends. In spite of the recognition of human qualities in production, a key question remains unanswered: the question of why economic growth is important. As pointed out by Aristotle: “Wealth is merely useful for the sake of something else” (See footnote 69 chapter 3). This “something else” is the expansion of human freedom, the ethos of human development. The double values of the human capability approach give this concept a broader perspective. More education – better health care and other factors – should be the empowering instruments to raise people’s critical consciousness, enabling them *to choose* whether they *want* to be healthy, well educated and creative, rather than coercing them.

The capability approach regards the issue from a humanistic point of view. Hence the focus on the importance of the direct values emphasises the normative interpretation of the human development paradigm: the importance of the human well-being, consciousness-raising and empowerment of individuals and communities that are meant to comply with the demand of rights and social justice for all. However, the die-hard economic interpretation and implementation of the strategies outlined in the paradigm fit well into the neo-liberal economic policies that developing countries are forced into by Western capitalism. The dilemma becomes even more sensitive when applied to non-homogenous societies in the Third World. Today there is an estimated 300 million indigenous peoples, more than 5 % of the world’s population.<sup>41</sup> The problem is of specific seriousness in South East Asia. Five countries in South East Asia, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam have a total population of approximately 196 million with an ethnic minority population of approximately 20.6 million, or 10,5% of the total population of the area. The distribution in the respective countries is illustrated below with Thailand as having the lowest number of indigenous peoples (1.3%) and Laos the highest (45.7%):

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<sup>41</sup>“...some have placed the number as high as 600 million” (Watson 1997:389).

The distribution of indigenous populations in the Southeast Asian Region is illustrated in the map below<sup>42</sup>:



Besides the inherent troublesome coexistence between the indigenous populations and the ethnic majority, the external impact has become a significant determinant in the relationship. To the extent that the elites of these societies have opted for modernisation, the development policies and strategies for these population groups are highly determined by the hegemony of the West: “Development continues to mean what it has always meant: a standard by which the West measures the non-West” (Sardar in Munck & O’Hearn 1999:49).

Many stereotypes have added to the marginalisation of indigenous peoples. Among the most immovable are: indigenous peoples have been stereotyped during colonialism and by modernisation theories as “traditional” populations clinging to the past, but “...who must undergo inevitable change which will allow them to enjoy the supposed benefits of modern (Western) society” (Loomis 2000:896). They tend to be considered as backward farmers or subsistence hunter-gatherers in intimate contact with, and reliance on, nature. Their cosmology and philosophy tend to be rejected as non-analytic and non-scientific. The contributions

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<sup>42</sup> “The statistics do not include the sometimes significant Chinese, Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Thai or Vietnamese populations resident in second countries for a considerable length of time and still perceived as ethnic minority population, e.g. the Phu Thai in Laos” (McCaskill & Kampe 1997: p.7)

indigenous peoples themselves have made to the debate of sustainable development are most often ignored because they are considered as too idealistic and even obstructionist. And finally, indigenous peoples have been “...understandably reluctant to engage in dialogue for fear of losing control over their knowledge, or becoming embroiled in abstract debates about issues that are for them a matter of survival” (Ibid., p.896).

In its present form and essence the modernising process accentuates whatever the original marginalisation tendencies have been. This is mainly due to constraints that are created by Western - and Western-influenced - theorists, researchers, policy makers and development practitioners. Die-hard concepts keep the capability formation among indigenous groups outside the people’s own control. Most human development programmes are planned and sought implemented according to external models that hardly empower people and make them able to choose and thereby “...be full members of the society with some control over their destiny” (cf. Griffin & Knight)

Thus from a humanistic point of view people are considered as the **end** goal of development and the human **capabilities** are what needs to be nurtured. The **direct values** are the essential, and the normative quest for the cultivation of human potential would be achieved.

From an economic point of view, on the other hand, people are considered as the **means** to development, they are considered as human **capital** (in line with financial and physical capital). The term “human *resource* development” most often stresses the role of people as capital, and the acquired **indirect values** of education are deemed the most essential for functioning and inclusion in economic and political life.

The interrelatedness between the two approaches cannot be denied, and two interrelated factors determine the implementation of a country’s human development policy. First, national capacity building strategies in poor countries like the Lao PDR rely heavily on the human resources and their ability to enter the growing industrial labour market with the necessary skills. Thus from an economic as well as from an ideological perspective it is not in the Lao Government’s interest to even consider the humanistic understanding of the term human development. Second, as a consequence of the economic re-orientation policy, the Lao Government may not- in its own optic- consider itself in a position to question most developed countries’ interpretation of human development.

In the rich parts of the world, people's socio-economic situation is different, nearly all are literate and most people enjoy full employment based on adequate skills. human development and "human resource development" are synonyms and skills training courses and career development for employees constitute the core of the programmes. This understanding is exported to developing countries, and again the Western world's power to define imposes itself on the developing world claiming that the Western perceptions are to be understood as universal.

## **2.2. The 'Universality' of Rights**

One of the consequences of the Second World War was that the notion of human rights was put on the global agenda through the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The victory of human freedom was celebrated and the principal objective of development was declared to be human well-being. A series of UN conventions established the principles of people-centred development. The post-war period was also the time of struggles for independence in many developing countries. The liberation struggles in the colonies were not just for political freedom, but also for improved welfare.

### **2.2.1. Education as a Human Right**

The rights to have a good health, to be adequately nourished as well as to have adequate shelter are among the central human capabilities that people should be granted according to Martha Nussbaum. The fourth of the 10 functional capabilities she claims as a universal value for all human beings is "...an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training" (Nussbaum 2000 (b):78-79). Nussbaum adds: "Literacy is a concrete specification for the modern world of a more general capability that may have been realized without literacy in other times and places" (Ibid.,p.77-78). Adequate education, literacy, basic mathematics and scientific training in the above quotation is presumably encumbered with western determined contents, but Nussbaum's modifying statement should be interpreted as a recognition of an educational practice, an oral tradition, that has been valued from pre-modern times, and a capability that for some population groups might still be valuable. Capabilities can be thought of as human rights, because they fulfil a similar role in the formulation of constitutionally guaranteed principles. There are however theoretical, linguistic, philosophical and conceptual difficulties associated with the interpretation of human rights (Ibid., p.97).

Some of the problems connected with the plethora of declarations of different kinds of rights are how the term “universal” should be interpreted and hence whether the term “universal education” can have any meaning. In a historical perspective “universalism” is a legacy from the colonial period; the mandate of the Covenant of the League of Nations<sup>43</sup> just after the First World War continued to legitimise the developed world’s intervention in developing countries by claiming that, apart from the economic and political interests, there were “...supposed to be universal values – civilization, material and moral well-being, social progress” (Rist 1997:62) from the “enlightened” world that should be conveyed. Universalism was synonymous with European<sup>44</sup>, and apart from the American Independence Declaration in 1776, the Eurocentric focus on the rights of citizens can be traced as long back as to the Magna Carta from 1215 (England), and the Declaration of the Rights of Man from 1789 (France).

Nearly two hundred years later the latest international declaration on universal human rights was written in the aftermath of the Second World War. The authors of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights might have assumed that the term “universal” could be applied unchallenged. However, despite the attempts to reconcile conflicting cultural and ideological tensions in a preceding symposium, one of the subjects in the declaration, the Universal Right to Education, is still debatable.<sup>45</sup>

Article 26 of the declaration states:

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be accessible to all on the basis of merit.

and it continues:

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

([www.un.org/Overview/rights.html](http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html))<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The League, established in 1920, was the first formalised attempt to create an international body to secure peace. It included representatives from states throughout the world, but the United States of America was not a member. The League was dissolved in 1946 and provided a model for the United Nations Organisation (Baylis & Smith 2001:56)

<sup>44</sup> From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the European states were colonial powers.

<sup>45</sup> Joel Spring states that the U.S. Congress in the 1950s refused to ratify the declaration due to the lack of consensus on the term ‘universal’ (Spring 2000:ix)

<sup>46</sup> Retrieved 29 January 2005

These clauses have left some questions unanswered. The authors have assumed that “all people share the same beliefs about learning and development” (Spring 2000:2):

a) there is no universal justification of the right to education. Can the right to education for all the world’s peoples be justified regardless of differences in cultural, religious and political circumstances in the world’s countries?

And another unsolved problem:

b) there is no universal definition of the meaning of education. Is there a universal concept of education applicable to all cultures, does education have the same meaning in every culture? Which kind of education will be most appropriate to guarantee “the full development of the human personality”?

#### **2.2.1.1. The World Conference on Education for All in 1990**

These problems were left unsolved in the hope that the world at some stage would reach a common understanding, but the philosophical and ideological divergences continued with undiminished strength throughout the Cold War period. Therefore the expectations to the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Thailand in 1990 were high. However, the considerable number of delegates from national governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations and education professionals did not succeeded in agreeing on “...an adequate and complete justification of the right to education and definition of education” (Spring 2000:6).

The most significant difference between the two declarations is the changes in the vocabulary: education is replaced by “educational opportunities” and “learning”. This could be considered as an opening up for other ways of conceptualising education and thereby avoiding any controversy concerning the understanding of “universality” as a concept created and monopolised by the West. The first two clauses in Article 1 in the framework for action of the declaration illustrate the linguistic softening:

- 1) Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving, and the basic content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to

make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time.

- 2) The satisfaction of these needs empowers the individual in any society and confers upon them a responsibility to respect and build upon their collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage... to further the cause for social justice...ensuring that commonly accepted humanistic values and human rights are upheld...

In article 3, clause 4 the target groups are specified, and now includes, among others, indigenous peoples.

An active commitment must be made to removing educational disparities. Undeserved groups – the poor, street and working children; rural and remote populations; nomads and migrant workers; indigenous peoples; ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities; refugees; those displaced by war; and people under occupation – should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities.

(UNESCO: World Declaration on Education for All 1990:3)

In principle these clauses give more space for interpretation and recognition of cultural diversity. The emphasis on “quality of their lives”, “develop their full capacities”, “participate fully in development” as well as the intention to protect and nurture “humanistic values” and “empowers the individual” are lent from the vocabulary of the development discourse in the decade when theories such as the human development paradigm became the prevailing approach.

The ambitions for educational development at national and sub-national level were high as described in the Conference’s Framework for Action. The Framework stresses the importance of community intervention, and universal access to “basic” education -without defining what that entails- should be reached by the year 2000. Reduction of the disparity between male and female literacy rates, emphasis on the poor and disadvantaged and revision of curricula were considered as the most important steps ahead (WCEFA, Framework for Action p 3-7).

However, as Joseph Müller states:” None of the targets of Jomtien has been fully achieved” (in *Adult Education and Development* 55/2000:29). The Jomtien conference was not to be considered as a “...single event but the start of a powerful movement” Ibid., p.30), and the most significant follow up was held in 2000<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> UNESCO has established a consultative EFA Forum to keep the EFA movement alive through a series of worldwide meetings that have taken place since 1990: 1991 in Paris, 1993 in Delhi, and 1996 in Amman. The mandate of the Forum is to support national initiatives as well as to encourage multilateral and bilateral donors

### 2.2.1.2. The Dakar Conference on Education for All in 2000

The purpose of the Dakar meeting was a confirmation of the visions introduced at the 1990 conference and to review the assessment of the progress made during the Jomtien Decade and to renew the commitment to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals and targets now by the year 2015 (Ibid., p.31). There are only few differences in the renewed Framework for Action. The elimination of gender disparities as well as improved access to education for disadvantaged, vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities have been more explicitly emphasised. The supple wording from the Jomtien Conference is continued in the Dakar declaration, but the participants did not find it important or possible to reach clearer definitions of education, “appropriate learning” and “quality in education” (Ibid., p.19-22).

The Ecuadorian researcher Rosa María Torres expresses an interesting critique of the two conferences, which encompasses the divide between a problem solving (preservation) and a critical approach (transformation). Her main objection is that she finds the initiative “...more along the lines of the tradition of *preserving* and *improving*, rather than the challenge of *rethinking* and *transforming*” [italics in the original] (in *Adult Education and Development* 55/2000:141). The word “rather” could suggest that Torres assumes that e.g. some, if not all, indigenous peoples want to be modernised. The critique concentrates on the indicators used in the assessment of the expected progress from 1990 to 2000: number of enrolments in schools with no recognition of the learning that takes place outside schools; indicators of learning are limited to the formal education sector, isolated from other areas (health, nutrition etc.); indicators for children’s and adult education still focus on literacy and indicators of education are still after 10 years centred on formal qualifications (Ibid., p.142-143)

R.M. Torres pleads for a broader concept of “basic education” and a revised vision of the EFA initiatives if the intended goals are to be met. She highlights especially the dialectical relationship between teaching and learning in the sense that, traditionally, learning is assumed to take place automatically if the focus is on the teaching methods. Govinda from the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, agrees. To enhance the dynamic aspect of the change that the initiative is supposed to achieve, the aggregate indicators should be replaced by process indicators: “...such as changing policy environment, supportive legislative measures, civic society responses, intensified actions/programmes in the field, local



community consultation processes, and improvement in the quality of teaching-learning processes” (NORRAG NEWS No. 26, April 2000:50)

R.M Torres advocates for more emphasis on the “*value and meaning of learning*” [italics in the original] (Torres 2000:146). In order to do this, Torres finds it crucial to reassess the theoretical and practical meaning of lifelong learning by accepting that learning is not restricted to teaching or schooling, but the educational processes should as well be linked to social processes i.e. work, culture and daily life in general. The reaffirmation of the focus on learning is according to Torres the challenge ahead, and she argues for a new conceptual and operational framework (Ibid.,p.146-154), and admits that the language used in the two declarations does open up for a broader interpretation.

Fifteen years after the first conference on Education for All, the problems concerning the justification for “universality” as well as the definition of how to understand education still remain unsolved. Thus, there are at least two conclusions that can be drawn from the above. One must be considered as negative and the other can be considered as positive. First, the insufficient results in terms of the number of out of school children have increased by 13 mill. from 1990 to 2000 (NORRAG NEWS No.26, April 2000:1). In this regard it should be acknowledged, though, that several factors must be seen as contributing to this state of affairs: population growth, more complicated education needs e.g. information on HIV/AIDS and a changed dynamic relationship between education and political and economic processes in developing countries. However, the conceptual critique put forward by Torres’ mirrors the epistemological ethnocentrism that delimits education to “schooling” that reflects the Western understanding of the concept. The weight put on quantifiable indicators such as the emphasis on enrolment rates, statistics on efficiency, teaching performance, formal qualifications, education as isolated from other areas of daily life, are all measurements that are embedded in the Western education culture, where education is supply-driven and to a great extent the responsibility of state institutions<sup>48</sup>. Despite the focus on *quality* in the educational rhetoric over the decade between the two conferences, Torres draws attention to the lack of indicators in that respect. According to her the quantifiable indicators and “the race for numbers” reflect a restricted and conventional approach to education, more “associated with *expansion* than with *transformation*” [italics in the original], and that the time has come to “...build new scenarios

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<sup>48</sup> See chapter 3 for critique of the Human Development Reports

and relationships, and define a new common sense for education and education reform” (Torres 2000 p.148-149).

Thus the claim for a wider concept of education is the second conclusion that can be drawn from a scrutiny of the two declarations, an interpretation that might inspire some hope. The initial guiding principles and visions of the EFA Conferences invite all concerned with education to define a new, expanded paradigm for education. According to Torres a new operational and conceptual framework building on integration will help to transform Third World societies. At the operational level she pleads for an increased linkage between the different spheres that influence the lives of individuals and groups and hence the sectoral thinking must be rejected. Education should aim at preparing people for active citizenship in terms of insight in the socio-political and economic structures, as well as education should be seen as an integral part of a specific group’s culture.

For this to occur, Torres sees it as absolutely crucial that the concept of education be broadened. The focus must shift from education to “learning” and not only rhetorically. This entails that all learning resources be respected: apart from the school it encompasses families (incl. inter-generational learning), nature, the whole community, media etc. It must be recognised that learning starts at birth and is demand driven, and not only the responsibility of the state. The rethinking of the concept also recognises that “each group and community has specific realities, needs and resources that will shape specific educational and cultural projects” (Ibid., p.151). Hence the expanded version of Education for All “...recognises the validity of all types of knowledge, including traditional knowledge” (Ibid., p.152). Torres claims that for basic education to contribute to alleviation of poverty as well as to obtain social and political justice and equality, it is vital to develop a new mindset concerning education. (Ibid., p.146-154).

Progressive educators like Rosa María Torres are willing to take the mainstream understanding of education a step further and re-interpret deeply rooted concepts. They acknowledge that education, “learning” and “knowledge” can mean one and the same according to the cultural milieu, and that different cultures, including indigenous cultures’ understanding of education as well as the value of their educational practices should receive recognition.

### **2.2.2. Cultural Rights and the Rights of Indigenous peoples**

Several international instruments dating from the last 20 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century challenge the Western hegemony by the intensified focus on cultural diversity and recognition of indigenous peoples' rights. Appendix 1 presents some pertinent articles from 1976 to 1994 on rights issues from international covenants, declarations and conventions. The articles illustrate a clear progression in the language over time from stating the indigenous' people's "...right to enjoy their own culture" to "...exercise control" and encouragement to "...revitalize their cultural traditions and customs"<sup>49</sup>. The intentions of validation and legitimisation of indigenous practices is followed by a demand for official informative and non-discriminatory picture of the different cultures. The respective governments' obligation to co-operate with the indigenous peoples in the planning and implementation of all development-related activities is a step further towards full recognition of cultural disparity.

The good intentions in these declarations were followed up by the end of the International Decade for Indigenous peoples in November- December 1998. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) convened a working group with the purpose of elaborating amendments to the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.<sup>50</sup> Many delegates stressed the importance of involving the indigenous peoples themselves in activities that directly affect their cultures and livelihood. The Danish observer emphasised that securing the rights of the indigenous peoples might be a difficult process, but "...it could not be completed without the full participation of those concerned, namely the indigenous peoples" (UN/ECOSOC 1999/82:8). The High Commissioner also underlined dialogue among all involved parties and "...encouraged governments to adopt a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples before the end of the Decade (2004)" (Ibid., p.9). Few will contest the aspect of justice in the normative statements of the articles as well as the fairness of the appeal to governments, but they evoke more questions than they provide solutions.

#### **2.2.2.1. Constraints in the Achievements of Cultural and Indigenous Rights.**

Rodolfo Stavenhagen draws attention to the difficulties in the achievement of cultural and indigenous rights in multicultural societies, and asks in which areas it would be possible for minority and indigenous groups to exercise autonomy. He emphasises at least two constraints in this connection. The first problem derives from the difference in definitions. "Culture" can be defined as "accumulated material heritage" alias "cultural capital", or "the process of artistic

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<sup>49</sup> See Appendix 1. The passages in italics indicate the progression in wording and show my emphasis

and scientific creation” alias “cultural oeuvres” (Stavenhagen 1997:152,153); but Stavenhagen broadens the definition to be “...the sum total of the material and spiritual activities and products of a given social group which distinguishes it from other similar groups” (Ibid., p.154). This definition adds to the complexity of the question of rights. Stavenhagen points to the fact that by using this broader definition it is difficult to encompass cultural rights in an adequate way in the existing declarations of rights. The principles of non-discrimination and equality as formulated in the various declarations “...basically relate to the rights of individuals” (Ibid., p.157), and the applicability to other cultures than the Western has until recent years remained unquestioned. His argument is that for the declarations to be applicable in multicultural societies a collective approach is required. This again engenders the problem of “...who can claim these rights and to whom they are applicable” (Ibid., p.157). Even if the rights of various minority groups appear in international declarations, it is still unclear what the different terms denote.

A second problem is linked to the cultural heterogeneity in many countries. The groups in the respective societies that wield power are normally the ones who “...decide the form and content of educational and cultural policies” (Ibid., p. 159). The political power defines the national culture, and as Stavenhagen expresses it: “... then expects all other groups to conform to this model, even if that means, in the long run, the destruction of other cultures” (Ibid., p.159).

This dilemma is reflected in the present case of indigenous peoples and modernisation, most noticeable in the Lao PDR. On its way to modernise the society the Government there is striving towards homogenisation of national culture, but the adoption of Western concepts in terms of education, human (resource) development as well as the changed economic policy represent serious obstacles for the fulfilment of the rights of the ethnic minority groups in the country. However, an indigenous discourse that contests the supremacy of the modernisation paradigms, a discourse that is accepted as morally legitimate and a discourse, lead by indigenous intellectuals, who demand an equal say in their own development is gaining increasing recognition.

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<sup>50</sup> 47 governments, 47 indigenous organizations and 19 non-governmental organizations attended the meetings (UN Economic and Social Council 20 January 1999:1). Neither the Lao PDR nor Thailand was represented.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The first part of the chapter is a discussion of bringing ethnicity back in the development discourse, especially of multi-ethnic societies in contrast to more homogenous ones. Development theories seem to have taken homogeneity of societies as a given state of affairs. Analysis of development in countries like the Lao PDR and Thailand that does not take this problematique seriously will be unable to contribute knowledge to the question of development in an ethnic environment.

The second part is a general discussion of the war of development paradigms that is important in the context of development of countries that are enriched and burdened by multi-ethnicity and poverty while attempting to join in the global economy under respectively a communist and a capitalist political leadership. The purpose is to establish a frame of reference based on the concepts and paradigms used in the international debate in order to apply them in the analysis of the Lao PDR and Thailand. This toolbox of the researcher is necessary in confronting the strategy followed by the state.

The third part deals mostly with the question of education in the context of socio-economic development and as applied to the formation of human capital in the strategy implemented by the Lao PDR and Thailand to integrate in regional and international politics and economics. This is done while the Lao PDR clinches to the attempt to include ethnic groups while still adhering to socialism and the project of creating a “socialist man” prototype and while Thailand strives to retain its position.

### 3.1. Ethnic Minority Groups in the Development Process

The question of the conditions and the rights of ethnic people became a substantial issue within anthropology studies during the de-colonisation process especially since the late 1960s. In principle, social sciences have embraced ethnicity as important for the development discourse since the 1980s. The world’s indigenous peopless had become better organised and formed their own networks not least inspired by a series of international declarations and conventions that brought the attention to the conditions and rights of indigenous peoples all over the world. The UN declaration on the Rights to Development of 1986, the ILO Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries of 1989, the Rio

Declaration of 1992 (also known as “Agenda 21”) and the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights of 1993 are some of the most important for indigenous peoples. According to these international documents, traditional knowledge must be recognised and validated, indigenous peoples’ access to the same privileges as the rest of the population and their participation in all areas of society should be guaranteed (Henriksen 1999:50-61). In the New World Order ethnicity has become an issue of international concern not least because of the continuing global poverty that followed the Second World War (Dwyer & Drakakis-Smith 1996:3-5). Apart from the persisting poverty, that in many countries was highest among ethnic minorities, other unsolved questions have followed in the wake of de-colonisation and wars. A main problem is the way development of the Third World has been defined and its assumptions acted upon, and in that connection how the ethnic question has been approached, if not neglected.

### 3.1.1. Conceptualising “Ethnic Minority”

Scholars disagree on definitions of ‘ethnicity’ (Stavenhagen 1996:4) and the term is often used interchangeably with ‘peoples’, ‘communities’ and ‘minorities’ - as well as with ‘indigenous’. In English there was no noun for the Greek *ethnos* until the early 1940s (Johnston et al. 2000:235), so the French noun ‘*ethnie*’ was used to denote an ‘ethnic community’ or ‘ethnic group’ (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:4). One definition of *ethnie*/ethnicity could therefore be:

“Ensemble d’individus que rapprochent un certain nombre de caractères de civilisation, notamment la communauté de langue et de culture”  
(Petit Robert 1993:830)<sup>51</sup>

This study will not engage in any discussion regarding the basis for classification of ethnic minorities, but anthropologists mostly agree on some distinctive common traits. Like most anthropologists Nash states that wherever there is a group of people “...there is some sort of *boundary*, and where there are boundaries there are mechanisms to maintain them. These boundary mechanisms are cultural markers of difference” (Nash in Hutchinson & Smith 1996:24). The markers of ethnicity, that can shift over time, can be of a fictive or metaphoric nature or of a more visible character. The sense of *kinship* belongs to the first category. People

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<sup>51</sup> In plural the ancient Greek word was used to denote the pagans (Berg cited in Hutchinson & Smith). In French the adjective ‘*ethnique*’ seemed to have had the same connotation (Robert ed. 1993:830). Over time the term has been used synonymously with the Latin ‘*natio*’ to distinguish the Romans from barbarian peoples, as well as some derivatives e.g. ‘*ethnocentrism*’ is “...used in social psychology on an individual or interpersonal level as synonymous for disdain of the stranger” (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:5-6)

of the same ethnic group share a myth of common ancestry which includes the idea of "...a common origin in time and place" (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:7). They have shared historical memories and "...a link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land" (Ibid., p.7), which can be considered as an *Urheimat* (Tapp in Wijeyewardene 1990:151). Apart from the eternal bond of blood throughout generations another untangible, cultural marker that constitute the specific group is the common "...*Weltanschauung* that helps to explain origins, clarify eternal questions, rationalize, and purports to offer an entre to universal truths" (Fishman in Hutchinson & Smith 1996:66). This "...*common cult*, implicating a value system beyond time and empirical circumstance, sacred symbols and attachments coming from *illo tempore*" [all italics in the originals] (Nash in Hutchinson & Smith 1996:25) constitute the basic boundaries between ethnic groups.

In addition, Nash points out that the other category, the "...frequent surface pointers include dress, *language* [italics in the original] and (culturally denoted) physical features" (Nash in Hutchinson & Smith 1996:25). This set of secondary markers also encompasses "...house architecture and interior arrangements, ritual calendars, specific taboos in joint social participation, special medical practices, and a host of other secondary and tertiary markers of differentiation" (Ibid., p.26)<sup>52</sup>. Fishman has a very interesting way of analysing the sense of belonging to an ethnic group by pointing out that a person's ethnicity finds expression in three phenomena: in her/his 'being', 'doing' and 'knowing'. In all manifestations of ethnic membership language plays an important role as a sign of differentiation. Language is an innate constituent of a person's 'being'. It is inherited as "...other physical gifts and capacities" (Fishman in Hutchinson & Smith 1996:63-64), and it links the past and present generations. Ethnic 'doings' are inextricably bound up with expressions like songs, sayings, prayers, rites etc.(Ibid.,p.65). 'Knowing' is deeply rooted in all cultures' needs to transmit the wisdom of the specific *Weltanschauung*, and here "...language permits an exquisitely refined and unique awareness of eternal verities so it contributes to a unique meaning of life..." (Ibid., p.66)<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Nash also includes physical features as secondary cultural markers as relevant in stating that "Physical elements may include skin color, hair form, height, density, eye shape, or whatever superficial things the culture stipulates as making for essential difference" (Nash in Hutchinson & Smith 1996:26)

<sup>53</sup> The importance of language as a distinctive classifier of ethnic belonging is further elaborated upon in the Introduction

Ethnicity is mostly linked to belonging to a minority group in any society. Most often an ethnic minority is numerically inferior to the rest of the population. Hylland points out that the concepts of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ are *relative* and *relational* [italics in the original], because they only exist in relation to each other, and the relationship is dependent on the relevant boundary system (Hylland 1993:121). The relationship between the majority and minority group(s) is more important than the numerical aspect. It is a question of power and control. According to Schermerhorn the dominant group can be “...a restricted elite, incumbents of a governmental apparatus, an ethnic group, a temporary or permanent coalition of interest groups, or a majority “(Schermerhorn in Hutchinson & Smith 1996:17).

One of these dominant groups can be considered as “dispensers of inequality” as claimed by Lâm (2000:207). The subordinate position that ethnic minority groups are reduced to finds a clear expression in Lâm’s definition of a ‘minority’:

“ [A] group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population, and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language”<sup>54</sup>

(Lâm 2000:5 - UN. Doc.E/CN.4/Sub.2/384/Add.1-7)

The boundaries and regulatory behaviour for the respective ethnic groups are accentuated when isolated from the dominant ethnic group. Most ethnic minority groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand have the distinctive symbolic and visible features of the ethnic characteristics described above, including the representatives from the Akha and the Hmong groups that

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<sup>54</sup> Definitions of indigeneity are contested and politicised. The definition of ‘ethnicity’ by Lâm might well be seen as synonymous with ‘indigenous’. An adequate definition that signifies population groups who are reduced to a non-dominant position is used by Shaw, who draws on the UN working definition: “Populations who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they form a part, under the State structure which incorporates mainly the national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominant” (Shaw 2002:57). Most often ‘indigenous’ populations denominate the first inhabitants of the particular state (cf. The First Nation populations of e.g.Canada). In the Lao PDR the political nature of the definition is expressed by some officials who oppose the term only being used to denote the Lao Theung and Lao Soung populations. They consider the term too broad and that it could as well be applied to ethnic Lao people. Some feel that the term is associated with the French period where “the term *indigènes* was used pejoratively” (ILO 1999:vii)- The World Bank used the term ‘tribal peoples’, but in 1990 the Bank has adopted the term ‘indigenous’ in its policy documents. In World Bank understanding “...the term indigenous covers indigenous, tribal, low caste and ethnic minority groups. Despite their historical and cultural differences, they often have a limited capacity to participate in the national development process because of cultural barriers and low social and political status” (World Bank document cited in Dharam Ghai 1994:72)



participated in this research. Put together all the ethnic minority groups in Thailand are by far numerically inferior to the majority of the population. In the Lao PDR it is questionable whether the Lao Loum numerically outnumber the total number of ethnic minority groups. As pointed out in the Introduction it depends on the classification system.

Regardless of the large number of non-Lao Loum groups, the assimilationist state policies are significant. This is due to the communist ideology as well as to the attempt to bring the country out of political and economic isolation. The same pressure for homogenisation is found in the capitalist Thailand.

### **3.1.2. Ethnic Minorities in the Post-colonial Discourse**

Around the Second World War period the term ‘ethnicity’ was a neutral way of distinguishing minorities from majority groups, e.g. referring to Jews, Italians and Irish populations in the United States (Hylland 1993:4). The meaning of the term changed and became encumbered with both negative and positive connotations. In the context of nation-building following decolonisation, modernisation theory whose concepts are still largely accepted, did not pay much attention to the ethnic dimension in Third World development discourse. Development theorists showed a “...paternalistic attitude toward non-European cultures” (Hettne 1990:72). The Third World populations in general were synonymous with ‘backwards’, ‘anti-modern’ and to a certain degree ‘non-civilised’; a state of affairs, it was believed, that would disappear as development progressed. There is no doubt that modernisation thinkers and practitioners from the West did not distinguish between the different population groups in Third World countries. They were all considered *en bloc*, and “...ethnic identity belonged to the traditional obstacles to development” (Hettne in Dwyer & Drakakis-Smith 1996:15). Still today newer development theories do not deal sufficiently with the ethnicity question and its complexity and that for two reasons.

Firstly, most development theories are still concerned with nation states and national economies which does not leave room for treating the ethnic factor (Ibid.,p.16). The concept of nation-state that the new independent regimes adopted from the ex-colonisers have split the existing territorial and cultural boundaries which have contributed to the complexity of the issue. In many post-colonial states this has added the negative aspect of ethnic cleansing to the development problematique, and consequently impeding the nation-building process. Hylland agrees with Hettne by stating “Modernisation and the establishment of a system of nation-

states have created a new situation for the people nowadays known as ‘ethnic minorities’ or ‘indigenous peoples’” (Hylland 1993:121).

Concerning the condition of minority groups in Southeast Asia, Tapp is very explicit in his analysis of the negative consequences caused by the delienation of frontiers created by the colonisers. According to him “The reality of the frontier, and the sovereignty of the nation-state which it symbolizes, has led to the increasing vulnerability of ethnic minorities in border areas to manipulation and exploitation by centrist administrations. At the same time it has led to their increasing strategic importance in terms of the power relations between the different states” (Tapp in Wijeyewardene 1990:149). In the Lao PDR, most Lao Soung groups mainly live in territories bordering China, Thailand, Burma and Vietnam. The Lao government is on the one hand trying hard to open up towards the modern world while at the same time struggling to maintain dominance over scattered population groups with different cultures. Thus an unresolved internal issue can represent a threat to the process of creating the national integrity that is necessary for a stable relationship with neighbouring states; thus leaving the ethnic groups in a politically exposed position.

The second reason for the lack of attention to the ethnic question by development studies, and linked to the above, is the fact that theorists as well as many practitioners still tend not to be sufficiently aware of, or even, disregard the heterogeneity of Third World populations and its significance. A case in point is according to Hettne found in the dependency theory’s assumptions on Latin America development. Hettne is criticising the dependency theory’s project of ‘indigenization of development thinking’. He argues that the assumption of the existence of “...more or less homogenous national cultures”, in many cases has proved to be “an erroneous assumption” (Hettne 1990:112). A positive approach towards indigenous populations arose in the 1970s, when intellectuals began writing about their conditions while simultaneously as indigenous art became fashionable, but one must agree with Hettne when he claims that “...it has had little influence on the social sciences” (Ibid., p.112). The main preoccupation of most development theories is still with the economy, and they have assumed that even if the population was not homogenous, ethnic minorities/indigenous populations would automatically be drawn into the process.

The marginalisation of ethnicity as a parameter in the study of the development of Third World countries appears to be a general lacuna. The colonial history and the economic development in

South East Asia have been different from that of Latin America as well as from that of Africa. The same can be said about state formations. Nevertheless, despite good intentions, the lack of attention to the heterogeneous cultures within the nation-states cause the same errors in the development process and thereby contribute to the growing polarisation.

Economic and cultural globalisation as well as the new structural demands in the new millennium seem to contain two tendencies: either introducing policies that strive to homogenise the different cultures in the countries in the name of national development or “...to reduce ethnicity to the folkloristic margins of society” (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:13). Here one should remember that in technical terms the dominant majority is “...no less ‘ethnic’ than minorities” (Hylland 1993:4). However, it is important to keep in mind the difference between a certain ethnic group’s self-identification and an ethnic identity ascribed to the group by others. As stated by De Vos the ascription from within the group itself as well as from external sources designate membership “...according to evaluative characteristics” (de Vos in Romanucci-Ross & de Vos 1995:16). Or as Guibernau and Rex express it: “...the perception of ethnicity will rest not upon some scientific sociological truth but on subjective interpretation” (Guibernau & Rex

1997:3-4). The criteria people use to classify themselves may differ from those applied by others, and both in developed as well as in developing countries it is rare that the majority and dominant groups consider themselves as ‘ethnic’. On the contrary, they consider people of culture, behaviour and appearance different from their own as inferior minorities, an attitude that has severe socio-economic as well as political consequences for the ethnic minorities.

### **3.1.3. The Historical Marginalisation of Ethnic Minority Groups in the Lao PDR**

Wijeyewardene makes the point that any taxonomy of ethnic groups is encumbered with complexity, but as many other scholars he has chosen the conventional way of categorising all ethnic groups in South East Asia, namely to classify them as “...occupiers of the valleys, the middle slopes, and the high mountains” (Wijeyewardene 1990:5). This taxonomy is divided in 5 groups. The Thai and the Lao Loum both belong to the first, the dominant group (Ibid., p.4). The 5<sup>th</sup> group mainly contains the mountain – dwellers that have the lowest socio-political

status (Ibid., p.5)<sup>55</sup>. According to Ghee and Gomes the political and economic peripheral status of minority groups all over South East Asia can be traced throughout history. They state that “...for centuries they [minority groups] have served as the primary targets in attempts by lowland states and colonial powers to subjugate or politically dominate them” (Ghee1990:2). Thus to understand how ethnicity is related to development it is important to sketch a brief historical overview over the power relations between the different ethnic groups.

There have been three main immigration waves in the history of the Lao PDR. The earliest inhabitants were Austro-Asiatic groups who have been present for several thousand years. They all belonged to the Mon-Khmer linguistic family (Ireson & Ireson 1991:921). Their descendants are now normally referred to as belonging to the Lao Theung groups. The socio-political organisation of the first inhabitants is wrapped in mystery, and there was a “...fluid constellation of power relations” (Stuart-Fox 1992:85).

The second wave of settlers took place from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 13th century. These migration movements, probably originating from China, brought groups of Tai-Kadai speaking language groups to Indochina<sup>56</sup>. One of these groups, or sub-groups, the Lao, presumably the ancestors of the present Lao Loum, showed more organisational talent than the Mon-Khmer groups. According to Ovesen the Mon-Khmer groups “...had no traditional social or political groupings beyond the village level” (Ovesen 1999:3). The Lao groups on the other hand developed effective political systems, installed local authorities and organised themselves in well-defined districts, known as *muongs* (Ireson & Ireson 1991:922). Over the centuries the new immigrants drove the Mon-Khmer groups from the fertile plains into the mid-altitude mountains, as well as using the Mon-Khmer people as contract labourers or even keeping them as slaves<sup>57</sup>, a practice that was abolished by the French (Stuart-Fox 1997:31).

Throughout the following centuries the Lao subdued the principalities of the Mon-Khmer groups, and with assistance from a Khmer army from Cambodia the first Lao kingdom was established in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The king granted the Mon-Khmer groups the usufruct of the land, and in return they acknowledged the legitimacy of the king (Ireson & Ireson 1991:922). From his exile in the court of Angkor, the Lao king brought Buddhist monks to his kingdom in

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<sup>55</sup> Wijeyewardene discusses the hypothesis of including Thai and Lao Loum in “a cover category, ‘Tai’ with sub-categories which include Siamese and Lao Loum” (Wijeyewardene 1990:4). He also claims that the Hmong together with the Yao “...are rapidly carving for themselves a position of relative power in modern Thai society” (ibid p.5). These speculations are considered important, but outside the scope of this study.

<sup>56</sup> The Tai-Kadai is the most significant ethno-linguistic group in all of South East Asia extending from Brahmaputra in India to the Gulf of Tonkin and China’s Hainan Island (Chamberlain et al. 1995:11)

Louang Prabang. For village communities this meant that the king's right to rule and the nobility's right to exercise local power found legitimisation in the Buddhist dogmas (Stuart-Fox 1986:4-5).

The third migration wave took place in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when groups belonging to the Tibeto-Burman and Hmong-Mien language families, originating from Burma, Tibet and Southern China, settled in the mountains of Northern Laos. The reason for emigration was to a large extent due to persecution in their former homelands<sup>58</sup>. These groups are now encompassed in the Lao Soung groups. Both the first settlers and the latest arrived populations were animists and practised shamanism. These mountain peoples nearly all grew opium, and as the Mon-Khmer groups now inhabiting the upland areas they derived their livelihood from slash and burn cultivation.

The different ethnic groups lived in autonomous homogenous villages without much contact between the villages. The geographical disparity, the differences in cosmology and cultural practices, the differences in farming systems as well as separate economic systems, customary laws and social organisation impinged interrelations. The dominant Buddhist Lao groups now occupied the fertile lowlands along the Mekong River practising wet-rice farming. The Lao rulers regarded the Lao Soung as “primitive savages”, but accepted their presence as long as they stayed in the mountains and paid taxes. (Ovesen 1999:4).

Thus since the 14<sup>th</sup> century the hegemony of the Lao groups has gradually “...attained a politically, economically and culturally dominant position” as claimed by Ovesen (1999:2). The mighty first Lao kingdom had territories on both sides of the Mekong River – an access the Lao Theung and Lao Soung groups were deprived of.

During the time when Laos was reduced to tributaries of Siam (roughly from 1779-1893) the power balance between the three ethnic groups in Laos did not change, and the rebellions instigated by the Lao Theung and Lao Soung groups against the Thai/Lao rulers and the French in the early 1900s were defeated.

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<sup>57</sup> Ireson & Ireson state about the Lao Theung, the descendants of the Mon-Khmer groups that : “Prior to 1975, they were collectively referred to as ‘Kha (slave) by lowland Lao...” (Ireson & Ireson 1991:921)

<sup>58</sup> The research populations both belong to these groups. Some anthropologists include both the Akha and the Hmong under the Tibeto-Burman language groups, whereas others e.g. Chamberlain claims that the Hmong groups are parts of the Hmong –Mien Ethnolinguistic Superstock (Chamberlain et al. 1995:20)

The dominance of the lowland Lao was accentuated during the French colonial period (1893-1949/1954). Prior to Siamese suzerainty, Laos had been divided into three kingdoms with Louang Prabang, Vientiane and Champassak as centres. The Siamese rulers had installed a vassal king in Vientiane, and also the French chose Vientiane as capital. As a rule the colonial administration "...appointed lowland Lao as district and sub-district officials, regardless of the ethnic composition of the area" (Ireson & Ireson 1991:922). Like the Siam rulers the French did not interfere with the division of administrative leadership in the provinces, districts and villages made up by the Lao Loum. Stuart-Fox states that the French were satisfied with the status quo: "The ethnic hierarchy thus formalized was administratively convenient"(Stuart-Fox 1997:31).

Lowland Lao nationalists led the independence movement against French colonial rule that started during World War II. The Pathet Lao took advantage of the resentment of the Lao Theung and Lao Soung groups against the royalist lowland Lao and recruited most of their revolutionary army among the mountain groups<sup>59</sup>. Minority representation among the leftist forces was high, as Ovesen points out they "...had great expectations that their loyalty to the revolutionary cause would be rewarded" (Ovesen 1999:9). Their hopes were met during the first years after the Pathet Lao victory in 1975, when the officials from the Royal Lao Government and other influential people had fled. The numbers of Lao Theung and Lao Soung cadres at all administrative levels as well as their representation in the Party were significant. Although there is still minority representation in official institutions, one must agree with Ovesen's statement: "But while the official policy ... was and is one of ethnic equality, the cultural prejudices among the Lao majority proved more difficult to eradicate, and among many 'Lao Theung', and 'Lao Sung' groups there is a widespread feeling that they have been let down by the revolution for which they made so many sacrifices" (Ibid., p.9-10). In the early 1980s the low technical standards and inefficiency of the minority people made the leaders replace them with technocrats from the former Royal Lao Government. Despite resolutions from 1981 and 1992 to upgrade ethnic minorities within different areas, ILO reports concluded that "...in the eleven-year period between the two resolutions (1981-1992), little was

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<sup>59</sup>Among the Lao Soung especially some Hmong groups and also several Lao Theung groups were recruited by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency as guerrilla soldiers supporting the lowland Lao nationalists. (Ireson & Ireson 1991:923).

accomplished (ILO 1999: xx).<sup>60</sup> The pattern of Lao Loum dominance is still prevailing and as Ireson & Ireson stress it "...is particularly visible in lowland interpretations of development issues and priorities" (Ireson & Ireson 1991:925).

#### **3.1.3.1. Brief Education History in the Lao PDR.**

Before Laos became a French colony in 1893, there were no public schools, and Buddhist monks carried out the education of children and youth in the pagodas. The monks were not only regarded as religious teachers but also responsible for generally educating people. Every village had a temple that served religious as well as educational purposes. Not only did children, youth and adults receive religious education but also general education in reading, writing, arithmetic, sculpture and traditional medicine in the pagodas (AsDB 1993:3).

In case of ethnic minority groups who were not Buddhists, no formal, academic education was provided, but the indigenous education systems provided the children with social and practical skills.

During the French Protectorate (1893-1949/1954) the French did not interfere with the practice of Buddhist education in the pagodas which, however, gradually ceded importance to the new formalised school system, although "...educational development in Laos was largely neglected throughout the French colonial period" (Ng Shui Meng in Zasloff & Unger 1991:161). Thant and Vokes give the reason why: "...the major activities were tin mining and opium production, [so] an educated labour force was not necessary" (in Than & Tan 1997:156). In 1907 the French established the first Franco-Lao schools where education patterned on the metropolitan model was given in French, and the students were the Lao elite. "As long as the Vietnamese filled the administrative positions and the Lao elite did not complain, there was no pressure to improve educational opportunities" (Chagnon & Rumpf cited in Stuart-Fox 1982:164).

The main task of the first Lao governors under the French protectorate was to guarantee the country a place in the Indo-Chinese confederation and to secure unity and peace in the country, which was not entirely pacified until 1936. Therefore formal education was not provided to the minority groups: "Les minoritaires (Kha, Hmong..), s'opposant encore à la pacification

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<sup>60</sup> The document from 1981 is entitled: *The Resolution of the Political Bureau Concerning the Affairs of Various Minorities, Especially the Hmong Minority*, and the one from 1992: *Resolution of the Party Central Organization Concerning Ethnic Minority Affairs in the New Era* (ILO 1999: xix)

française, avaient créé une insécurité en dehors des grandes axes freinant l'implantation scolaire dans les zones montagneuses" (Nordtveit 1993:58-59).

After Independence only minor improvements were made under the Royal Lao Government in the 1960s, but education was still a privilege available mainly to the rich and influential urban elite. Primary education became mandatory in 1951, but only children who lived near a school were obliged to attend school (Ibid., p.70-71). In practice the education policy remained under French control "...in fact, the urbanized, French-trained, Lao Loum leadership of the Royal Lao Government tenaciously and unabashedly clung to French colonial vestiges for another twenty years. The secondary and higher education systems reflected this phenomenon" (Chagnon & Rumpf cited in Stuart-Fox 1982:165)

Newer research confirms this statement: "Most of the rural population remained untouched, especially in the highlands where virtually nothing was done to give the ethnic minorities any role in the new Lao state. No attempt was made to mobilize the population in the cause of nation-building" (Stuart-Fox 1997:77).

#### **3.1.4. Inclusion and Exclusion of Ethnic Minority Groups in Modern Lao PDR**

Thus the paradoxical relation between inclusion and exclusion is nowhere more observable than among ethnic minorities. Their involuntary inclusion in the modernisation process embarked upon by the Lao state has exacerbated their exclusion. Among the multiple marginalities that constitute the life conditions of the minority groups, their geo-political peripheral status is perhaps the most incomprehensible. As already mentioned too few minority people are involved in actual politics in order to have real power of penetration, and in addition some of those involved have dissociated themselves from their indigenous background. A very striking injustice from a Western point of view is the marginal status of the ethnic groups. Rigg claims that they are both *de jure* and *de facto* deprived of citizenship (2001:118), but in fact they *do* have citizenship. However, it is the *de facto* socio-political marginality that characterises their lives. Pressure from both internal and external influential powers will no doubt contribute to change this state of affairs as modernisation progresses.

The two development priorities of the present government are: a) modernisation and b) security (ILO 1999: xvii). Modernisation policies encompass: resettlement, elimination of shifting



cultivation and opium eradication (Cohen & Littleton 2004:1). The resettlement policy<sup>61</sup> practised in the Lao PDR whereby minority people are moved from the sensitive border areas to lowland areas is a controversial issue. As in Thailand the question of citizenship is officially connected to the security situation. New villages are being established with road access, as well as schools and health clinics are often constructed in the villages. It is easier to influence and control politically suspect people among the minority groups once they are settled in less inaccessible regions.<sup>62</sup> The Lao PDR is still, at least in rhetoric, a communist regime squeezed in between its nearest neighbours, the capitalist moderately developed country, Thailand, and Vietnam that, although communist itself, shows a much more extrovert foreign policy; in contrast, the Lao government does not tolerate deviance from the ideological orthodoxy. Potential rebellious movements from some members of minority groups against the Government are easier prevented if people are settled along the roads.

Another argument for resettlement is the question of land use. The swidden agriculture practices in the hill areas are considered detrimental for the environment, and the mountain dwellers are being held responsible for all the ecological damage. This is an issue that is difficult to unravel, and it is true that some forms of the slash and burn practice are causing forest degradation. But Ireson & Ireson rightly emphasise, that other factors influence the land use policy, namely: "...rapid population growth and a demand for exportable timber" (Ireson & Ireson 1991:930). A simple question to ask here is: Why should the mountain dwellers destroy the land from which they derive their livelihood? And since paddy rice farming is not possible in the mountains, what other alternatives do the people have than to continue swidden agriculture? From the Government's point of view an increased export of timber is a welcomed opportunity to add to the country's foreign exchange revenue. But it is also a fact that not only the Government benefit from logging. Also private companies as well as individuals and the military with inadequate income are involved in the logging business. Stuart –Fox is very

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<sup>61</sup> 'Village consolidation' is the official name for resettlement, a focal zone strategy that has both physical and economic negative consequences for e.g. the resettled Akha groups: the agricultural production "...has not improved and had often become worse especially after relocation, and is not sufficient for sustainable livelihoods" (GoL 2003:45). Among the social sufferings resettled groups experience are illness and early death. Other forms of attempts on their wellbeing are the changing social relations and exploitation in a lowland market economy (Cohen & Lyttleton 2004:20-21)

<sup>62</sup> The numbers of resettled ethnic minority people are difficult to substantiate but according to the Swedish journalist, Bertil Lindtner, who has a thorough knowledge of South East Asian politics: "The Government intends to resettle as many as 800.000 Hmongs and other highlanders in the valleys to bring an end to slash-and-burn farming in the hills and to eradicate opium production. While foreign donors applaud both objectives, many fear the methods could further alienate non-Lao Loum nationalities" (Far Eastern Economic Review, January 11, 1996 p.26)

explicit in analysing the objectives for the resettlement schemes by stating that the Government wants to “...wean upland minorities away from their traditional, destructive slash-and-burn agriculture in order to preserve valuable forests (for official exploitation, or exploitation by officials)” (Stuart-Fox 1998:230). The poor villages in the mountains are the ones who do not profit from this traffic.

Also the problems associated with the tradition for opium growing among the mountainous populations is seen as an objective for resettlement in the lowlands, not least because of the increasing illegal drug traffic among the countries in the Golden Quadrangle. Opium reduction is part of the global ‘war on drugs’ and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime assists the Lao Government in implementing the policy (Cohen & Lyttleton 2004:1). Despite the disastrous effects it has on many families in the mountains, there are obvious reasons for continuous opium growing. The Lao Soung groups have done it for centuries and the climate in the mountains is favourable. It is an important crop for recreation and hospitality, and it is believed to be a panacea for many ills. From an economic point of view opium is a profitable cash crop or an item of barter, the price pr. kilo is high and transport is easy. In the high mountains it is often the only available crop and the production of opium adds to the family income. But at the same time as the demand is rising, there is an international pressure to eliminate opium as a cash crop, which further worsens the economic situation of the ethnic minority groups in the mountains.

Thus as stated in the Introduction the economic disparities and uneven division of resources represent a serious problem in the modernisation process. Foreign investment and private economic ventures are mostly concentrated in the lowlands, and in other provinces that are rather well off, but also investments in other provinces “...are all subject to government approval”, as pointed out by Ireson & Ireson” (1991:925). In principle, approval by the Governments ought not to be negative. Quite many foreign aid agencies focus their activities on the ethnic minority groups, and also aid projects need to be authorised by government. No aid agency should be interested in working against a country’s government interest, not least because it could have negative repercussions on the target population once the agency has pulled out, and if internal power structures change. However, the problem arises in cases where the development priorities and philosophy of the aid agency do not coincide with those of the government. A case in point is the role of education in the standardisation process in the Lao PDR. Curriculum developers are lowland Lao and the curriculum is based on lowland culture.

Foreign curriculum developers have only recently been attached as advisers, and aid agencies working with minority groups are only marginally involved in the implementation of formal education. Many international aid organisations and NGOs direct their special attention to 'ethnic minority needs'. According to Evans "Some Lao clearly feel that this attention to minorities creates national disunity" (Evans 1999:26).

National unity is a high priority for the Lao Government. The socialist state grew out of a multiethnic society in 1975, and the consolidation process is still impeded by limited budgets, external time pressure, and deficiency of skilled personnel. The ethnic diversity only adds to the complexity, and describing the cultural dichotomy might lead to oversimplification. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence of the dominance of the Lao Loum. The heritage from the first Lao kingdom in terms of Lao as the official language, Theravada Buddhism as the 'right' religion and the cultural traits and lifestyle of the Lao Loum are still recognised by the majority of the Lao Loum as superior and necessary in the building of a modern state. Political and economic controls are powerful mechanisms in the Laoloumification process, but education is perhaps the most powerful homogenising instrument as in all countries. The national education programme exposes the ethnic minority groups to value systems and a Weltanschauung that are incompatible with their history and traditions. The purpose is to modernise the 'backward' population groups, but as Young argues "...experience has shown that attempts at 'nation building' through ethnic homogenization cannot succeed" (in UNRISD 1995:2). Ghai states that "...ethnicity will not disappear with modernization, as it was once believed" (Ibid., p.1). Importantly in the context of globalisation, Ghai considers ethnicity politics to be "...a normal and healthy response to the pressures of the globalizing market" (Ibid., p.1).

The challenge for the Lao political system is how to 'educate', in the broadest sense of the word, the population to be active in the socio-economic change of the nation and not leave any ethnic groups out of that process. The task of nation-building in a multi-ethnic environment are more demanding than in homogenous societies.

### 3.1.5. Peripheral Status of the Hill Tribes<sup>63</sup> in Northern Thailand

In a historical perspective the accounts of the official Thai policy towards the indigenous mountain people are scanty. Until the twentieth century the lowland Thai considered the mountain regions as no-man's land, "...an obstacle between points of civilization occupied by 'wild animals and primitive people' (McKinnon & Vienne 1989: xx). However, there is evidence that the largest ethnic group, the Karen, the subject of foreign anthropological studies over the past two centuries, which comprises approximately 50% of the total population of highland ethnic groups, had a relationship to the suzerain best characterised as "...a laissez-faire policy". It must be assumed that also other mountainous groups enjoyed semi-autonomy "...to administer their own affairs and traditions", while at the same time being tributaries and dependent people under the protection of the rulers (Bhruksasri in McKinnon & Vienne 1989:12).

Such a non-interference policy remained in effect until the 1950s when Government intervention began. According to Bhruksasri there were three reasons for the establishment of the Committee for the Welfare of People in Remote Areas in 1951. First, it was claimed that the mountains people's cultivation methods spoiled the land for agriculture, while their depletion of the forests had detrimental consequences for the national economy. Second, the ethnic groups were opium growers, and following the guidelines of international conventions as well as its devastating effect on people's lives, the Thai Government was determined to eliminate opium production. The third reason for the government's development plans was a matter of security. Alleged Thai and foreign communists were infiltrating the ethnic groups seeking to incite rebellion (Ibid.,p.13-14)<sup>64</sup>.

Mountain people were thus said to create troubles for others, and since nobody likes drugs, land degradation and insecurity, the logic behind official argument was that since "...the problems are there, because the people are there, therefore let us move the people out" (McKinnon & Vienne 1989:xxi). Consequently measures were taken in a development crusade that began in 1959 with resettlement projects. After another socio-economic survey of ethnic groups in 1967 and as a follow up, one of the first many externally assisted opium substitution

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<sup>63</sup> The Hill Tribes in Thailand now prefer to be referred to as 'ethnic groups' or 'indigenous peoples' (Interview with Prasert Trakarnsuphakorn September 2005). Henceforth the term 'hill tribes' will only be used in direct quotations.

project was launched in 1973 with the assistance of the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control<sup>65</sup>. These government initiatives provoked strong reactions among the ethnic groups, which affected both military, police and civilians. Prior to that, in 1969, The Royal (Northern) Project initiated by the King can be considered as an attempt to pour oil on troubled water as well as a genuine wish to assist the hill tribes (Ibid.,p.15).

In 1976 a more specific integration policy was formulated. The government intention was "... to integrate the hill tribes into the Thai society whilst respecting their rights to practice their own religions and maintain their cultures". Assistance should be given to the ethnic groups "...for the purpose of helping them to become first class, self-reliant Thai citizens" (Ibid.,p.18). Modifications to the integration policy were made in 1982, in which the Government strengthened the objectives of the integration policy aiming "...to enable the hill tribes to live peacefully within Thai society and to enjoy a sense of belonging; to be good citizens; loyal to the nation; not to cause security problems and not place political or socio-economic burdens on the government" (Ibid.,p.20). A second objective of integration was to reorganise "... the life-style of both hill tribes and Thai lowlanders resident in the highlands". Furthermore development agencies working in the mountains "...should see that hill tribes be made fully aware of their place in Thai society, conscious of their right to maintain their way of life as Thai citizens"(Ibid.,p.20).

Bhruksasri finds that the integration policy "...implemented with tolerance and understanding truly reflects national ideology and the aspiration to form a united people linked in a common purpose for the national good"(Ibid.,p.25). He strongly argues against the foreign anthropologists who consider the Thai integration policy "...as incorporation by cultural assimilation" (Ibid.p.25). Nevertheless, there seems to be strong evidence that the Government's motivation behind the integration policy should be considered as: "...the homogenizing effect of the modernization ethic" (Rigg 2001:121).

This is related to the hegemonic assumption behind the modernisation project. Seen in this light, the heterogeneity of many aspects of the cultures between the lowlanders and highlanders in Thailand is considered an obstacle as "...nearly everything about the highlanders is problematical" (McKinnon & Vienne 1989: xxi). The resolution of this problematique is not

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<sup>64</sup> Rigg sees the reason for the communist foothold in the mountains as a result of a biased development policy in favour of lowland Thais. His assumption leans on a statement by the Deputy Prime Minister "...if stomachs are full people do not turn to Communism" (Rigg 2001:89)

<sup>65</sup> In 1964 the Tribal Research Centre (later changed to the Tribal Research Institute but abolished in the early 2000s) was established as a joint project between Chiang Mai University and the Department of Public Welfare.

simple. Contrary to the dominant position it is questionable whether the cultivation methods in the mountains cause environmental degradation (cf. Ireson's arguments on this issue in the Lao PDR). Discouraging the farmers to substitute opium with other crops is a very impenetrable and complex matter that has both national and international ramifications. The lack of citizenship for many people belonging to ethnic groups is linked to the question of security and suspicion, with the resulting vicious circle: a person cannot be given citizenship before s/he is known to be loyal to the state or not, and on the other hand: how can a person be loyal to a state that denies her/him citizenship?

Apart from a generalized attitude about ethnic groups, the "burden" of problems they place on the Government can hardly be interpreted as anything else but an attempt "...to justify the implementation of an increasingly radical policy of assimilation" (Vienne in McKinnon & Vienne 1989:37). The technical solutions the Thai government proposes in order to integrate the ethnic people (crop substitution, resettlement schemes and the reluctance to grant citizenship), do not seem relevant as they are imposed by external actors, managed from outside and often fragmented in their implementation. The centralised structure of decision-making in the Thai society adds to the alienation of the indigeneous people.

The ascribed political threat that the ethnic groups supposedly represent seems out of proportion in a country with a highland ethnic group population of less than 2%. Nevertheless they are considered as "different" and according to Vienne "Hill tribe people become more and more excluded and isolated from the resultant process of decision making, even in their own sphere of activity..." (Vienne in McKinnon & Vienne 1989:44). As the ethnic minority groups of the Lao PDR the indigenous peoples in Thailand appear to be victims of multiple marginality.

### **3.2. Human Development as a Paradigm**

The end of the Second World War gave rise to the celebration of human freedom, and the principal objective of development was declared to be human well-being. A series of UN conventions established the principles of people-centred development. The post-war period was also the time of struggles for independence in many developing countries. The national liberation wars in the colonies were not just for political freedom, but also for improved human welfare, and new development strategies emerged. The argument that peoples' material well-being was best achieved through accumulation of physical capital was challenged through the new human development approach. Strategies that seek to empower individuals have become

well-established approaches in reaching normative development goals such as social justice, equality and democracy. The Western concept of human development originated in the 1970s, and the consensus behind focusing on human resources, has become one of the prevailing development paradigms. Economic growth and capital accumulation as the means to development had left the human factor behind, and economic development strategies started to take the human element more into account, as well as ideological transformations in some parts of the world influenced the world economy. “Indeed the human development approach has become the intellectual framework for much advice given by the United Nations Development Programme to developing countries” (Griffin:2002:xv).

### **3.2.1. Towards the Evolution of the Human Development Paradigm**

The post-war restructuring of capitalism (The Golden Years – the 1950s and 60s) was a boom in the developed countries, based on full employment and low inflation – especially in the US and Western Europe. Thus there was considerable optimism - at least in the West. The development process in the Third World – guided by an economic mantra – consisted of transforming these countries from *traditional* societies into *modern* societies. Modernity was to be reached by economic growth, the emphasis was on capital accumulation, and investment and GNP were considered as indicators of development.

Planners had not entirely neglected the development of human resources, but the focus was on the productive value of economic activity, and people seen essentially as human capital was central. The improvement of the human workforce was regarded as a form of capital investment – education was a productive investment. For the human capital theorists two requirements are deemed necessary for economic growth: improved and more efficient technology and the utilisation of human resources in the employment of technology. This demanded a certain level of skills and therefore efforts within the education sector in Third World countries were concentrated on secondary and tertiary education. The primary level should receive the residuals from the higher levels of education. In this optic food, housing and health were seen as necessary for the optimal utilisation of human resources. “Put simply, a well-fed, healthy and well-housed population is seen as more productive, both physically and psychologically” (Fägerlind & Saha 1989:47).

However, already in 1969 the British economist Dudley Seers criticised the development policy and practice for being too focused on the attainment of economic growth. He was one of

the first academics who started redefining development in a more encompassing manner by focusing on pertinent human-centred aspects such as:

- low levels of poverty;
- low unemployment;
- relative equality;
- democratic participation in government;
- national independence in economic and political terms;
- adequate and accessible education.

(Drakakis-Smith in: Dwyer and Drakakis-Smith 1996:274)

And the simple questions asked were:

- What has been happening to poverty?
- What has been happening to unemployment?
- What has been happening to inequality?

(Martinussen 1999:293)

Thus a basic challenge was raised to the dominant paradigm as to whether development and economic growth could be considered identical twins. “If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, and especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result ‘development’, even if per capita income had soared” (Seers 1972 cited in Martinussen 1999:294). In this light economic growth was seen as a necessary but not sufficient condition for human development. Seers was sceptical as to the relevance and the use of advanced technology in countries with traditional productive activities. In the modernisation paradigm traditional farming technology and practices were considered as primitive and obstacles to development, and therefore they had to be neutralised or superseded. Thus, transfer of modern agricultural technology was the chosen strategy in order to increase production for export. Seers’ critique of modernisation was also aimed at the privileged groups in the developing countries that benefited from economic growth - the powerful elite whose political integrity was increasingly being questioned (Colclough 1993:1-2).

The importance of these arguments marked a turning point between the dominance of the earlier growth paradigm and the ascendance of new ones. The strategy of economic growth as a panacea to development contributed to aggravate the conditions for the increasing number of poor people in the developing countries. The 1970s showed a shift in the conventional discourse away from growth at all costs, based on the monoconcentration on GNP towards a “redistribution with growth” model. This new paradigm suggested ways in which the increase



in growth could be used for investments in services and assets for the poor, and thus improve the distribution of income without reducing the incomes and assets of the rich (UNDP 1996:47). The World Bank became interested in combining growth with support to the poor with "...a continued commitment to growth in industry and other modern sectors, but combined with special measures aimed at assisting the 40 poorest per cent in each of the developing countries" (Martinussen 1999:298)<sup>66</sup>. Accordingly most measures are centred on an expansion of the labour market. The growing industrial sector leads to massive rural-urban migration in most developing countries, and women became a crucial category in economic development as head of households, and as employees mainly in the informal sector. A sociological transformation in the making!

The redistribution policy and the focus on poverty alleviation that characterised the 1970s made the World Bank and the international aid agencies change their strategies. The financial and technical support was now reoriented more directly towards the poorest people, regions and countries. Sectors which had a direct impact on the welfare of the poor and marginalised were paid more attention. The focus on - and loans to - education programmes shifted from secondary and tertiary education to primary schooling as well as primary health care were prioritised – areas where the social rates of return are highest, in terms of e.g. fewer and healthier children. The goal was human development rather than economic growth alone. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) published a series of research reports under the World Employment Programme concerning these new concerns which "...provided detailed advice for policy change to national governments" (Colclough 1993:2). The studies argued that "...growth apparently did not lead to substantial expansion of employment opportunities and increased income for the poor" (Martinussen 1999:298). The migrant labour from the rural areas could not meet the requirements of the technology-intensive emerging industries in towns. Thus the recognition that growth with migrant employment model as a means of obtaining a more equitable income distribution and reducing poverty had failed (Hewitt 1995:228-229).

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<sup>66</sup> The World Bank suggested that "...seven types of policy instruments can be employed to this end" all dependent on the respective countries' circumstances: 1) Measures to make labor cheaper relative to capital and thus encourage the employment of more unskilled labor, 2) Dynamic distribution of assets by encouraging the creation of assets that the poor can own, such as improved agricultural land or small shops, 3) Greater education to improve literacy, skills, and access to the modern economy, 4) More progressive taxation, 5) Public provision of consumption goods, such as basic foods, to the poor, 6) Intervention in commodity markets to aid poor producers and consumers, 7) Development of new technologies that help make the low-income workers more productive" (Todaro 2001:143)

In the mid-1970s, the ILO enunciated the special measures that should be taken in order to meet the needs of the poorest and thereby make development more people-centred. The organisation introduced a more direct approach to development: The basic needs strategy. Many development researchers, international aid agencies as well as the World Bank adopted the main ideas. This approach does not originate from a coherent development theory, nor does it comprise one fixed set of measures, but it reflects different emphases and priorities. The objective of the basic needs concept is ...” to provide all human beings with the *opportunity* [italics in the original] for a full life (Streeten et al. 1982: 21)<sup>67</sup>. There is a general consensus behind the approach that basic needs should include:

- 1) need for food, shelter clothes and other necessities in daily life.
- 2) access to public services such as drinking water, sanitation, health and education
- 3) access to participate in, and exert influence on, decision making both in the local community and in national politics.<sup>68</sup>

(Martinussen 1999: 298-9)

This approach is often referred to as: Incomes, Public Services and Participation or “count, cost and deliver”. However, these priorities got lost in discussions on growth rates, savings ratios because none of the agencies and organisations put these priorities as the core of their assistance; their strategies were still mainly growth-oriented.

Furthermore, the approach was criticised for being top-down, accused of leaving out the less material dimensions of human well-being, and for not empowering the marginalised. The basic needs approach did not turn out successfully because no special strategy for the poor had been worked out – a strategy that would have made allowances for the heterogeneity of the poor in terms of differences in ethnic affiliation, religion, language and gender. The fundamental shortcoming of the approach was its reliance on a moral imperative to break the exclusion of the poor and to fulfil the needs of human beings. Only few governments in the Third World followed the suggestions made by the ILO. The rampant poverty overshadowed the normative demands of development.

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<sup>67</sup> Streeten calls the basic needs approach: “a conceptual forerunner of human development” (in ul Haq 1995:vii)

<sup>68</sup> As an example of the paradigmatic struggle within development studies it can be mentioned that these fundamental elements in promoting human well-being had already been formulated in the 1950s by Pitambar Pant in India– without achieving acceptance (UNDP, HDR 1996:47).

By the late 1970s, the basic needs human-centred approach appears as unrealistic and was pushed in the background. Events like the oil crisis, decline in growth, increase in interest rates and debt crises contributed to return attention back to the growth concern. This was the turning point of what was coined “ ‘the counter-revolution’ in development theory and practice”, a development philosophy in favour of freely operating markets as the solution to Third World problems (Toye 1987:vii)<sup>69</sup>.

During the 1980s the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund strengthened their economic influence over developing countries by means of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). The different adjustment programmes were intended to help developing countries respond to external shocks and to transform Third World economies from dependant debtors into efficient and competitive producers on international markets. In the case of agricultural production, however, this implied that the focus shifted from food crops to cash crops. The consequences were nutritional problems and bad health, because women - who very often are heading single-parent families - had less time and food for children. Structural adjustment forced governments to alter their expenditure priorities, and budgets for health and education services were reduced considerably. A. Escobar mentions that studies have documented that the adjustment programmes had an unintended, positive effect through the emergence of creative survival strategies in the families and thereby promoted social change and more female autonomy in the family. But in spite of a few positive results, there is no doubt that the adjustment programmes have caused tremendous human suffering and widespread environmental destruction while emptying debtor countries of their resources. (Escobar, 1995:176-77).

Regardless of the impact of the external factors, most Third World governments cannot be exempted from responsibility in the so-called ‘lost decade’. Bureaucracy and securing private benefits for government officials made many state policies neglect the obligations towards the excluded segments of their own populations. Another critique that can be directed at these regimes is that instead of extending the role of the state and thereby assuming the responsibility of addressing the severe problems of the poor, they gave way to the neo-liberal approach. More

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<sup>69</sup> There were, however, differences within the counter-revolutionary group concerning issues of welfare economics: some adherents were of the opinion that free trade was not an option for developing countries. On the contrary they were convinced that the governments had to control wages, process, imports and the “distribution of productive assets” (Toye 1987:73). Concerning the effectiveness of foreign aid Toye points to several anomalies in the redistribution of the world’s resources. E.g. as many taxpayers in donor countries are poorer than many people in the developing countries, official aid can have “regressive income in the world income distribution”

and more poor countries suffered from the consequences of the debt crisis and the free market forces. Simultaneously, the former central position human development had in the paradigms influencing policy making at the international level was scaled down due to the priority given to structural adjustment programmes and economic interests.

The relapse into mono-concentration on economic growth and the measurement of the level of development entirely on the basis of economic indicators gave rise to a growing scepticism among international researchers, organisations and development practitioners. The new plural concerns within the international development community recognised the need for increased attention to the conditions of the poor. Relief organisations became concerned with hunger and epidemics. Writers focused on the disparities between the rich and the poor, and humanists started “...voicing the need for social justice in the quality of life” (Sen, 2000:21). Philosophically minded people referred to Aristotle and Immanuel Kant as the roots of the human development paradigm<sup>70</sup>. By the end of the 1980s the harshest critique of the economic growth paradigms came from e.g. UNICEF, church organisations, NGOs, trade unions and ILO. According to Sen the concept of human development gained influence “...because the world was ready for it” (Ibid., p.21), while ul Haq claims that the merit of the new paradigm was that 1) it lacked a general development theory and 2) it questioned the alleged automatic link between economic growth and human well-being. The new realities with emerging democracies in many developing countries, the demand for accountability, social responsibility and human rights were new realities that gave way for more pragmatic reasoning within a broad framework (Ibid., p.21-23).

The challenge for the international community in the 1990s was to restore the emphasis on people as the first priority of development both at a conceptual as well as at an operational level (UNDP 1988:1). UN Round Table sessions have been held since 1986 dealing with “..the development crisis of the 1980s, the concern for human development in economic adjustment

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(Bauer cited in Toye 1987:141. Another anomaly of aid is that aid money might not used to relieve poverty ,as “...such attempts infringe its [the government’s] sovereignty” (Ibid., p.141).

<sup>70</sup> Aristotle (384-322): “Wealth is obviously not the good we are seeking, it is merely useful for the sake of something else” (in Sen 1989:44). And Kant (1724-1804): “Handle so, dass du die Menschheit, sowohl in deiner Person als in der Person eines jeden anderen, jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals bloss als Mittel brauchst” (in:Vorländer 1965:52). Also economists have been occupied with the human dimension e.g. Adam Smith, and “A similar strain was reflected in the writings of the other founders of modern economic thought, including Robert Malthus, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill” (ul Haq 1995:13)

policies, and the management of human development” (Ibid., p.v).<sup>71</sup> The Human Development Reports, published since 1990, are maybe the most significant initiative concerning human development. The reports describe progress in both developed and developing countries. The first yearly Global Forum on human development was held in 1999, and the first issue of the biannual *Journal of Human Development* was published in 2000. These initiatives can be considered as the Western world’s most important attempts to promote the philosophy of the human development approach..

In the new millennium all international development agencies and national governments alike have in principle adopted the human development strategy. The philosophy of regarding people as the end and not only as the means of development is intended to meet the demand for a more balanced, equitable and thereby a more socially and politically sustainable development. The concern for the growing polarisation and disparities between majority and minority populations, not least seen in the light of the globalisation process, has made human development the actual mainstream development strategy, but it is debatable whether neo-liberalism as dominant paradigm share the same view.

### **3.2.1.1. Main Features of the Human Development Paradigm**

People as the end goal of development can be viewed from different angles. Bearing in mind the fundamental principles of Aristotle and Kant the development of people as an end in itself needs no further justification. Freedom, self-realisation and equality ought to be the noblest objective for all development efforts.

The first issue of the Human Development Report defines human development as:

...a process of enlarging people’s choices. The most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to live long and healthy lives, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect

(UNDP, HDR 1990:1).

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<sup>71</sup> The themes treated at the Round Table sessions are published: e.g. “Human Development: The Neglected Dimension (1986), Human Development, Adjustment and Growth (1987) and Managing Human Development (1988) (UNDP, HDR 1988:v)

Griffin and Knight elaborate on the concept in the context of a more societal oriented point of view:

Human fulfilment is about whether people live or die, whether people eat well, are malnourished or starve, whether women lead healthy and tolerable lives or are burdened with annual childbearing, a high risk of maternal mortality, the certainty of life-long drudgery, whether people can control their lives at work, whether their conditions of work are tough and unpleasant, whether people have access to work at all, whether people control their political lives, whether they have education to be full members of society with some control over their destiny.

(Griffin & Knight 1989:10)

Economic growth is unquestionably vital for reducing poverty, but it does not necessarily enlarge people's choices within the social, political and cultural spheres, nor does it automatically engender self-development. There is no guarantee that income is evenly distributed within all societies, and the national priorities in developing countries are often given to e.g. military budgets at the expense of social services. In other words the use of income is just as important as the generation of income itself. Many choices are not dependent on accumulation of wealth. There is no automatic link between democracy and wealth, between respect for human rights and wealth, and between equality of the sexes and wealth. Political freedom, cultural assertion, as well as access to knowledge and health services are human choices that go beyond economic welfare (Haq ul 1995:14-16).

The four essential components that constitute the human development paradigm are: equity, sustainability, productivity and empowerment. The notion of Equity is the fundamental philosophical concept behind the universal claim that any human being must be valued for its own sake. *Equality* is perhaps a more appropriate term to use in practical dealing with the conditions of individuals in a society. According to Mahbub ul Haq, the main architect of the human development paradigm, enlarging people's choices means, , that there should be equal access to political and social opportunities as they are regarded as basic human rights. Having equal access does not mean that the obtained results will be the same (Haq ul 1995:40-41). What people decide to do with their acquired opportunities is an individual choice. However, enlarging people's choices will inevitably result in a restructuring of power in the society (e.g. through land reforms, fiscal policy, credit systems etc.). The power equalisation will lead to removal of the barriers that prevent marginalised groups like ethnic minorities and women in developing countries to participate in many areas of social and political life (Ibid., p.16-17). The claim for equality is the core element of the human development paradigm in the sense

that it will change deeply rooted control functions in the society, and an element that underlies the three other essential features of the paradigm.

The Brundtland Report stressed the ‘distributional equity’ which means that sustaining all forms of capital: physical, human, financial and environmental is vital both for the present (intra-generational) and for future generations (inter-generational). “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission 1987:43). The opportunities granted the present generations must not jeopardise the possibilities for future generations to create levels of well-being suitable for their lives. For ul Haq ‘sustainable development’ is synonymous with ‘human development’, and to him Sustainability means “...that everyone should have equal access to development opportunities – now and in the future” (Haq ul 1995:19).

As an objection to the economic growth approach some development strategies have neglected the importance of productivity as a prerequisite for development. However, according to ul Haq productivity is an indispensable constituent of the human development paradigm. The huge investment in human capital in Japan and Korea has endowed these countries with a new status not only in the East Asian region, but also in the world economy. In the context of this discussion, the geopolitical aspect of the ascension of these countries to their current positions is left out. Nevertheless, this example indicates that productivity is only one element of the human development paradigm as people here are regarded as a means and not as the end of development (Ibid.,p.19).

As opposed to the welfare paradigms (e.g. human welfare and the basic needs approaches) the human development paradigm is not based on charity. People must be given the opportunities to take part in decisions in all the domains that affect their lives. The fourth feature of the human development paradigm is the empowerment of people which stresses the importance of creating a political, economic and cultural environment within which they are able to “...exercise choices of their own free will” (Haq ul 1995:20). Basically it is a question of a shift in existing power structures. Clarke epitomizes the essence of human development in stating that: “Human development is the emphasis on empowering the people rather than ‘developing’ them, enabling them to choose whether they want to be healthy, well educated and creative, rather than making them so” (Clarke 1996:3).

These four constituents embrace all aspects of human development and for ul Haq it shows that this strategy is not anti-growth. The link between economic growth and human development is substantiated in the fact that investment in health and various kinds of education has paid off in countries like Thailand, Korea, Japan and Malaysia. A more equitable distribution of income with people participating in economic activities has proved favourable in e.g. Malaysia, Korea and Chile. A redistribution of public expenditures in favour of increased budgets for social services has benefited people in e.g. Cuba, Jamaica and Sri Lanka. If the empowerment of women, more than half of the world's entire population, is successful it is yet another proof that human development is linked to economic prosperity. Women's employment opportunities not only in the informal but also in the formal sector, will be a substantial contribution to the household economy and in a wider perspective will influence the national economy in a positive direction. According to ul Haq the interdependency between economic and non-economic factors in the development process is a rediscovery of the real purpose of economic growth (cf. Aristotle and Kant) (Haq ul 1995: 20-23).

#### **3.2.1.2. Critique of the Human Development Paradigm**

The Human Development paradigm is captivating in all its simplicity, which is both a source of strength and weakness. In principle, everybody involved in development at all levels can easily subscribe to the moral aspects of the paradigm. However, the strategy embodies difficulties of a conceptual nature as well as posing problems at an operational level. A global human agenda will need to fit into any development mission statement and strategy for both governments and aid agencies. The normative development goals inherent in the strategy such as democracy, social justice and equality is in many developing countries considered as "...an invention of the North that they could not afford" (Martinussen 1999:301). At the same time it is difficult to disagree with ul Haq when he claims that: "An unjust world is inherently unstable – both politically and economically" (Haq ul 1995:18). Changing peoples' minds is a long-term process and seen in this perspective the constituents of the human development strategy appear to be rather unobtainable or even unrealistic, as well as open for different interpretations.

Especially the demand for equality for all and empowerment of the individual brings the complex question of universalism versus cultural relativism into the centre stage. Despite differences between developed countries, there is general agreement in the Western world that equality between men and women and among all population groups is fair and ideal even



though not yet fully implemented in all aspects of life. In most developed countries access to education and health services are regarded as a universal right for all. We might not be sufficiently aware of, nor willing to accept, that developing countries do not place equality high on their list of development priorities. Also internal cultural imperialism by dominating groups in the developing countries can be an obstacle for inclusion of marginalised groups in the society's social, economic and political life.

The fair words in the Brundtland Report require accountability towards present and future generations as far as sustainability is concerned. But as ul Haq phrases it, who would know what the needs for future generations will be, who would define them and worry about them "...if the present generations are poor and miserable?" (Haq ul 1995:79). The vague definition behind the formulation by the World Commission could be, and often is, interpreted as a demand to assure replenishment of natural resources. It would be easier for development actors to focus especially on environmental issues as the agenda for sustainability, which however vital, is but one of the means to assure that people are guaranteed security in order for them to sustain their lives.

Economic growth as an imperative to sustain peoples' lives has become an axiom in the development field, and most actors both in developed as well as in developing countries are engrafted with the postulate that economic growth *per se* is a panacea to all underdevelopment-related diseases. Yet ul Haq poses the challenging questions: "But what type of growth? Who participates in it? And who derives the benefit?" (Ibid., p.40). The use, meaning a more equal distribution, of the generated income is a cornerstone in the thinking of ul Haq. It makes sense to claim, that after the often detrimental consequences of the mono-concentration on growth strategies and the very theoretical ways of explaining the reasons for "underdevelopment", the world was ready for a more pragmatic approach to development. However, what the international community might not yet be ready for, is acceptance of global responsibility that is the quintessence of the human development paradigm. The growing number of countries adopting neo-liberalist policies is not ready to acknowledge the human development paradigm's greater emphasis on non-economic and non-quantifiable indicators - least the dire consequences for the development of marginalised groups.

The concept of empowering the individual does not only mean to enhance opportunities within the social, economic and political life. The feeling of being empowered means to achieve self-

respect as well as having a sense of belonging to a community and assertion of cultural values. Despite the vital necessities that are common for all human beings there are variations in what individual and collective psychological development means in different cultures. These differences do not only exist between Western and non-Western cultures; the heterogeneity within most developing countries and hence the often inaccurate picture one gets of empowerment efforts may seem as a shortcoming of the notion. However, this weakness should not be ascribed to the empowerment concept itself, but rather recognised in the fact that those who interpret the process and the outcome of empowering people might interpret it according to the values of the majority culture, Western as well as non-Western. The human development paradigm's claim of enlarging people's choices by achieving the capability of being knowledgeable represents a similar problem. "Knowledgeable" is not clearly defined. This could be considered as a source of strength in the sense that the paradigm offers concepts that can be adapted to cultural specific environments. On the other hand it leaves room for any majority culture to use it according to the dominant political ideology.

The quality of being empowered and knowledgeable does not translate in immediately measurable capabilities, and the results might not be tangible enough for governments, development agencies/donors and media to take into consideration. Attempts to quantify the outcomes of such a strategy could be considered as obstacles for human development to be accepted as *the* paradigm, although a wealth of statistics presented by various agencies and organisations are making serious efforts in this direction.

The launching of the first Human Development Report (HDR)<sup>72</sup>, the brainchild of Mahbub ul Haq, in 1990 is a serious attempt to turn the development discourse towards a more normative position and bring focus back to people-centred development strategies. The yearly reports are commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and written by a selected team of scholars, development practitioners and members of the HDR Office. Some researchers consider the reports to be "...in some ways an antidote to the heavily economic focus of the World Bank's 'World Development Report'" (Clarke 1996:2). The textual part of the HDRs continually emphasises on the large and increasing global disparities (Sagar & Najam 1999:746), and comprises an abundance of statistics on wealth, health and knowledge (Ibid., p.744). The second part is the Human Development Index (HDI) and represents a key

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<sup>72</sup> The Human Development Reports are translated into a dozen languages and published in more than 100 countries annually. Almost 100 national reports and some sub-national reports have also been completed (Sagar & Najam 1999:743)

element of the reports. Different indicators are used to measure the determinants of human well-being (e.g. number of hospital beds and teachers) or outputs of well-being (e.g. health or literacy). Also economic indicators are used to gauge the relation between income and life expectancy. (Streeten 2000:27).

The HDRs are relevant in the sense that they introduced social indicators<sup>73</sup> in the measurement of development, and despite inaccuracies in the statistical material, especially with regard to developing countries, the annual reports serve as a yardstick of the state of affairs in the respective countries. The main purpose of the HDRs is to constantly remind the world and policy makers that development is more than the “simple accumulation of wealth” (Sagar & Najam 1999:749). The quality-of-life indicators of human development should make politicians and governments more democratic and accountable (Henderson in Griesgraber & Gunter 1996:125). Nevertheless, even though the reports are becoming more differentiated, they can be perceived more as a routine exercise (Sagar & Najam 1999:744) and a data information than a source of interesting revelations and insights about the development progress. Objections to the usefulness of the Human Development Reports are many and one reason is as Streeten claims that “...human development is a much richer concept than can be caught in any index, whether GNP, the HDI or any other “ (Streeten in ul Haq 1995:xii). A weighty critique of Eurocentrism comes from many developing countries in the sense that they consider the HDI, including the Human Development Freedom Index, as measuring the developing countries after Western criteria (Henderson in Griesgraber & Gunter 1996:125)

To a certain extent it is fair to claim that the developing world is measured after Western understanding and standards, but which might also coincide with the (adopted) values of the majority populations in the developing countries. The heterogeneity of populations in these countries is not reflected in the Human Development Reports. Because the contribution of the poorest and disadvantaged, encompassing the ethnic minorities, to national production is insignificant, they are included in the general assessments that give a distorted picture of the national level of human development. The 1990s were designated as the decade of ‘indigenous populations’ by some Western development agencies, but the Human Development Reports do not mirror the human well-being and development of indigenous peopless. Despite the

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<sup>73</sup> The demand for new indicators was not least introduced because of pressure from representatives of Non-governmental organisations at the Rio Earth Summit and Global Forum of 1992. (Henderson in Griesgraber & Gunter 1996:119).

recognition of domestic disparities, Sagar & Najam claim that “...there seems to have been no sustained effort to incorporate them [indigenous peoples] into the index (1999:748). Representatives from the marginalised communities themselves are hardly invited to participate in the compilation of the reports by sharing their views and experiences – not even in the reports that are produced in the respective developing countries themselves.

Another important aspect to take into consideration in analysing the progress in human development is the question on what criteria those involved in development frame their hypotheses and strategies. Research on human development ought to build on practice in order to be of use for policy-makers in the developing countries as well as for the international aid organisations. Streeten clearly points out that: “Purely academic exercises, however valuable in advancing our knowledge, are not of interest to the Human Development team” (Streeten 2000:25). It should be noted, however, that the teams that should build their research on practical experiences do not explicitly intend to involve minority groups in the collaboration between teams in industrialised and developing countries. According to Streeten the key persons in the Human Development team “...should as much as possible, cooperate with and draw on existing research in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, other UN agencies, research institutes and the rest of the academic world” (Ibid., p.25). In general, it can be stated unequivocally that the practice that forms the basis of research has not taken the experiences of marginalised minority groups into account. Most development research is carried out by Western academics, whose results are published in Western languages, and besides, organisers of national and international conferences seldom invite indigenous peoples to participate let alone to express their points of view.

Western scholars also constituted the majority of the speakers at the Global Fora on Human Development where ideas, theories, concepts and research innovations in the study of human development are exchanged. The contributors to the first issues of the *Journal of Human Development* were mainly economists, international political economists and Western intellectuals discussing new typologies in the distinction between developed and developing countries. The lack of contributions from ethnic population groups was obvious and could be seen as demeaning to ethnic intellect. The content of later issues of the journal has changed towards themes of a more normative and philosophical character encompassing studies of human rights disciplines and assessments of quality of life and freedom. The increased

representation of writers from developing countries might be a contributing factor to the change of focus (UNDP 2000 (b): *Journal of Human Development* Vol.1, No 1)

Despite the often well—founded critique that can be addressed at the various aspects of the Human Development approach, it has become a prerequisite for developing countries to have Human Development planning offices. In a modernisation process it is necessary, but one could question whether the more or less adapted Western models of Human Resource planning are appropriate for multi-cultural societies in least developed countries.

### 3.2.2. HRD Policy in the Lao PDR

The above discussions of the importance of ethnicity in the context of a multi-ethnic “underdeveloped” society and the paradigmatic evolution of human development theory permit the scholar to apply the toolbox to the concrete case of the Lao PDR.

The transitional phase for the Lao PDR began in 1986 by the change in the national and international economic policy. The long-term objective for the Lao PDR set by the political regime “...is to quit once and for all the status of a least developed country by the year 2020” (GoL 1998:6). Development of the country’s human resources as an explicit and important constituent in pursuit of this goal was first discussed in the Leading Committee of Human Resource Development established in 1993. In the following years, different ministries, provincial, district and traditional authorities as well as various organisations and not least several donors were involved in the planning process. The first Human Resource Development (HRD) Policy was published in 1995, and as a follow-up of a Round Table Meeting with donors in 1997 a more concrete medium-term guideline for 1998 –2001 expressed the government’s policy. This *Précis* is centred on strategies for capacity building for public management and community development that are considered as “...an absolute prerequisite for the *mise en oeuvre* [italics in the original] of our social, economic and administrative reforms” (Ibid., p.3). The intention of the HRD strategy is also to improve the participation of people at all levels in national development (Ibid., p.3). The Human Resource Development programme is one of the eight priority areas<sup>74</sup> that constitute the main development strategy,

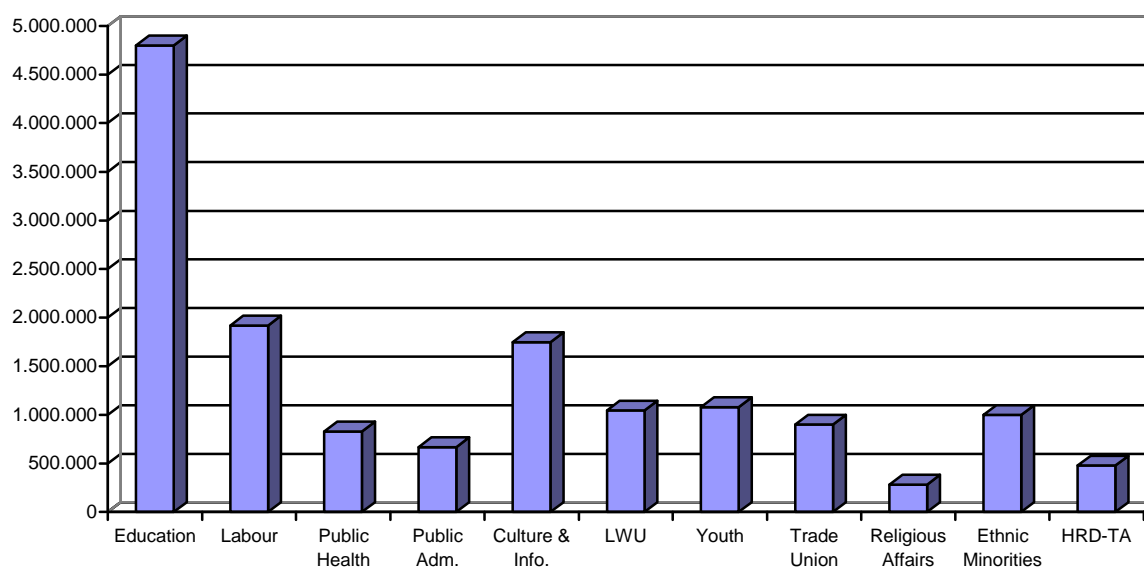
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<sup>74</sup> The eight development priority areas are: increased food and commercial production, shifting cultivation stabilisation, rural development, infrastructure development, increased external economic relations, human resources development and services development (GoL 1998:6)

and “are proposed as the major thematic reference for the donor community in its consideration for continued support” (Ibid., p.6)<sup>75</sup>

The whole HRD programme is divided into 10 sub-programmes and an additional technical assistance component. Each of the 10 sectors is subdivided into 3 integrated areas: i) institution strengthening, ii) knowledge and skills and iii) community outreach (aiming at improving the standard of living in the rural communities). Figure 1 and 2 illustrate the division of the different components. “The estimated total investment needs for the proposed HRD programme amount to US\$14,760,000.

**Figure 3: Total HRD Investment Needs by Sub-Programme 1998-2001 (US\$)**



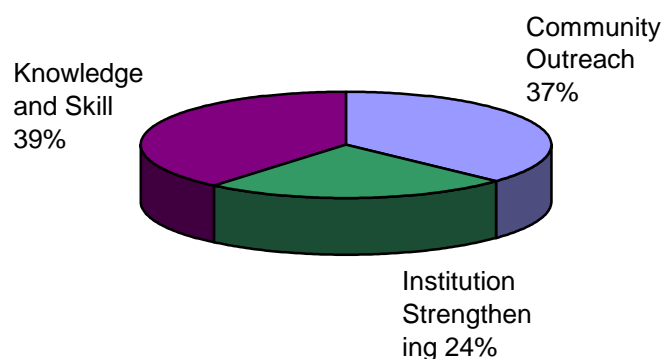
The last column indicates the Technical Assistance (TA) that is needed for HRD area

(GoL 1998, HRD, Précis :6)

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<sup>75</sup> The total external funds allocated to this programme constitute more than 12 mill. \$ and domestic funds 2,5 mill \$ (GoL 1998:18)

**Figure 4: HRD Programme and Project Outlines**



(GoL 1998:18)

The Government stresses that “Lao PDR’s multi-ethnic society represents an incredible wealth for our country and is of extraordinary significance for its unity and strength” (Ibid., p.14). This richness could be seen reflected in the fact that many of the HRD sub-programmes are linked to issues concerning ethnic minorities.

The overall impression one gets from studying the operational HRD *Précis* is that it is a meticulously planned and apparently efficient strategy. However, a closer look reveals that the approach is very top-down, and the planned reforms are centred on quantitative and structural improvements. According to sub-programme 10, the ethnic minorities’ training in management, administration, documentation and technical capabilities has first priority. As is the case with the managerial training of the ethnic minorities also the development of village leaders and volunteers in community development have external, meaning Lao Loum and foreign aid personnel, organisers and trainers. Nowhere is it indicated that the ethnic minorities themselves are to have responsible roles in their own development (Ibid., p.37-38).

Education accounts for more than a third of the total expenditure and in terms of the components in the project outlines, institutional strengthening encompasses building the capacity of school managers and administrators at all levels. The first priority in the community outreach programme is to increase the enrolment of minority children, and the second is construction of schools (Ibid., p.19-20). According to the National Census of 1995 37.6 % of the population aged 6+ had never been to school “...with marked differences by gender, urban/rural areas, age and ethnic groups” (UNPD 2000 (a):50). As an example of the situation for minority groups the same statistic shows that 67,2 % of the Hmong groups had

never been to school (Ibid.,p.92). The adult literacy rate among Lao Loum is 75,2 %, whereas only 26,5 % of the Hmong groups can read and write. The lowest rate of literacy is found among the Kor (Akha) groups, where only 3,8 % are literate.<sup>76</sup>(Ibid.,p.93).To train and upgrade especially primary and secondary school teachers in new teaching techniques and methodologies constitute the second project outline. Most of the funds, for both education and other elements in the total programme, are spent on construction, management skills training for government officials at national, provincial and district level. Again few local actors are to be involved in the outreach project, e.g. no local resource persons are meant to take part in any planning processes. In the whole process in the development and use of human resources, there seems to be little value accorded to the existing learning resources and indigenous practices.

The two main players in this game are the donors and the Lao Government. External contributors constitute 83% of the total funding (especially the World Bank, AsDB and UNESCO), while the remaining 17% are to be provided from domestic sources (GoL 1998 p.5). The economic situation and the endeavour to modernise force the Lao Government to accept the outside influence. Alton et al. point out the dependency relationship in following manner: “Both the IBRD and the AsDB, with large loans, have exerted substantial influence on government policy, in the interest of standardized infrastructure-heavy education which conforms to curricula designed to meet the economic needs of industrialized countries” (Alton et al.1998 p.10).

In principle, the 1998 HRD *Précis* is also an undisguised signal to the donor agencies that the Lao Government is no longer a passive recipient, but an active player, and that a dialogue between the two parts is imperative. However, there is no conceptual disagreement between the donors’ and the Lao Government’s objective of developing the country’s human resources through standardised education programmes.

A third player in the human resource development process in the developing countries is the foreign NGOs. Some of the funds are provided by international NGOs - organisations which, in general, are proponents of alternative development priorities: increased focus on normative demands such as human rights, equality and democratic participation, and hence in principle more interested in supporting indigenous populations and their empowerment.

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<sup>76</sup> Despite the unreliability of statistics in many developing countries, the differences between the majority and minority groups are significant.



Other players, the many ethnic minority groups, who are involuntarily being included in the modernisation process in the Lao PDR, are seldom asked, if ever. The development of human resources has become *the* trend in the development debate, and enormous amounts of money are allocated to the task. Competent and well-meaning experts and advisers are competing in planning and implementing training programmes, and evaluating teams produce bulky reports enumerating the tangible results of human resource related activities all over the developing world. The growing labour market in the Lao PDR shows that the various training and educational activities whose purpose is to increase the human capacities for the growing industrial sector still absorbs too few ethnic minority groups.

### **3.2.3. Human Resource Development Policy in Thailand**

As did the government in the Lao PDR and in other Asian countries, the Thai government began to pay increased attention to HRD as a valuable component in development after being faced with the economic crisis in the late 1990s. It should be noted, though, that some development projects had HRD on their agendas already in the 1980s. And as in the Lao PDR the Thai human resource development policy can be considered more as a reflection of politics than of development (Rigg 2001:88).

The first national human development report on Thailand appeared in 1999 (published by the UN), aimed at reflecting on the human development progress during the last 3 decades, and to recognise the impact of the crisis and to identify measures to enhance sustainable development. The report substantiates considerable progress in terms of higher employment rates, a decline in the number of malnourished children and progress in the adult literacy rate and increased enrolment rates during the period from 1966-1999. (UNDP 1999:3-8).

The aim of Thai development policy since the 1950s “...has been to exploit its comparative advantages of abundant land, natural resources and labour with little thought for long-term sustainable growth” (Phongpaichit & Baker 1998:287). The economic crisis severely affected the human development of especially the poor, as rapid economic growth nearly inevitably leads to greater inequality. As a consequence “...many had come to question the meaning of development” (Ibid.,p.281) Therefore, the new Constitution in 1997 is said to mark a turning point in Thai development policy. In principle, the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) represents a paradigm shift in development thinking. In the new development discourse the main focus was put on development of human resources through education, health care, greater local participation, decentralisation etc. (Ibid.,p.308). In

addition, the top-down approach was to be abandoned in order for people to “...achieve their full and innate potentials as human beings. It is a plan that focuses on the needs of the poor and disadvantage groups” (UNDP 1999:9). The report states that one of the positive effects of the crisis is the reorientation of the development strategy towards future well-being of all levels (Ibid.,p.146).

Nevertheless, one has to admit that the rhetoric is typical for the UN-understanding of human development, which puts progress under the human capital formation headings, including measurable indicators. Competition is a repeated theme in the whole report, and one of the main future priorities within human resource development is an enhanced focus on a well-trained and formally educated labour-force (Ibid., p.157). Although the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006) repeats many of the same objectives of greater local participation as the Eighth Plan, the tone of this present 5-year plan reflects a reversion to the ambitions of before the crisis. The Plan (re)introduces the policy instruments that can help Thailand to overcome the crisis and thus bring the country back as a regional economic power. Free trade, financial liberation and new technologies are the means to reinvigorate the Thai competitiveness in the world economy (UNDP 2003:38-39).

Putting emphasis on labour force that is qualified to the demands of advanced technology is necessary in a development process, but the reaction to this first human development report on Thailand was met with heavy critique from both local NGOs and many development practitioners. They claimed that a human development report without due consideration to the country's minority groups does not portray the full picture, as well as ignoring the fair words from the initial concept of human development such as enlarging people's choices through capability formation.

Therefore the expectations were high when the second Human Development Report on Thailand appeared in 2003. The cover photo shows a huge stage poster of the Assembly of the Poor<sup>77</sup> gathered in front of the Government House with a banner saying: “Assembly of the

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<sup>77</sup> The Assembly of the Poor (founded in 1995) is one of several new organisations that appeared in Thailand in the 1990s to represent rural demands. According to Chris Baker “The emergence of the Assembly of the Poor has been one of the most striking political events in the 1990s” (South East Asia Research 2000, Vol 8, No 1, p.5). In the article Baker quotes Praphat Pintoptaeng (1998) who explains the Assembly's emergence and success in terms of three main elements: “... the ‘political opportunity’ which opened up with the decline of Cold War repression; the adoption of an organizational model based on loose networking; and the building of alliances, particularly with middle-class pressure groups, on the common ground of environmentalism” (Ibid.,p.6). Baker claims that the Assembly of the Poor is “...a classic peasant struggle over rights to land, water and forests” (Ibid.,p.27), but at the same time it goes beyond these specific peasant demands because :“The use of the word ‘poor’ in the

Poor demands action on the (Government's) promises". The production of the HDR 2003 started out well, in recognition of the UNDP promises of putting the people up front. Thus the first chapter loyally left the floor to invited community members' own description of how outside-planned development projects have failed to recognise the communities' ability to analyse their own problems, albeit edited and structured by a professional writer. The report continues to evaluate the changes the decentralised institutional framework has undergone over the years, from the establishment of the Tambon [subdistrict] Administrative Organisations (TAO) in 1994 whose task it is to promote the intended people-centred development. Amendments were made to this structure over the years, and in 2001 the praxis of direct election of village members to the TAO was abandoned in favour of a more bureaucratic model more like the government structure. Thus not surprisingly a Northeastern villager asked "Are we getting "TAOs of the state" or "TAOs of the people" (Ibid., p. 44).

The voice of the invited community members fades away as the report ironically continues to recommend the promotion of empowerment by the communities themselves. Instead, the last chapters of the human development report bring normative statements forward on how the changed development approach should be implemented and how extensive participation by community members is crucial for sustainable development. The poor are silenced in favour of praise for the various projects initiated by the government and investigations carried out by public research institutions, which seem to be the pivotal point of the report.

One should not deny the fact that it is difficult to quantify well-being in numbers, as the attached statistics on the usual employment rates, health statistics and enrolment rates clearly demonstrate. However, the outstanding opportunity in this report to learn from the people who are mostly affected by globalisation, the invited village representatives, was apparently neglected. The proposals they presented in the initial chapter on how to further develop their capabilities in terms of e.g. the advantages of a combination of local and national natural resource management as well as combining the local educational understanding and practices and the national education programmes were not taken into account.

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organization's title serves as a constant reminder of the widening rich-poor gap, and of the monopoly of the rich on direct political representation" (Ibid., p.28)

### 3.3. Education as a Vehicle for Socio-economic Development

Educational expansion has received much more attention after World War II and has been considered as a catalyst for economic development and modernisation, and as such there is no doubt that in shaping the future of developing countries investment in human resources e.g. education, is of fundamental importance. From East Asia it will suffice to mention Japan and South Korea as examples where education was given high priority.

On a global scale “...the increase in public expenditure on education in the 1960s and 1970s exceeded increases in any other sector of the economy. By the 1990s educational budgets in many developing nations were absorbing 15% to 27% of total government recurrent expenditure” (Todaro 2000:329). However, as a consequence of the structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s developing countries were forced to curtail their educational (and health) budgets with serious social implications.

In the new millennium, globalisation makes great demands on craftsmanship and there is a latent agreement that integration in the international division of labour demands a work force that is equipped with skills qualifications that can only be attained through education policies. However, some scholars argue that globalisation does not indicate any significant qualitative change in the way the capitalist world economy functions, and that “...current globalisation represents no more than a return to pre-first world war era” (Wade, Sachs & Warner cited in Stewart, 1996:327). According to McGinn (cited in Carnoy 1998:21) the transmission of knowledge through educational programmes has generally changed very little in most countries as a consequence of globalisation.<sup>78</sup>

In contrast to these arguments, Stewart, among others, claims that no country remains “completely untouched” (Stewart 1996:327)<sup>79</sup>. The global economy has increased opportunities “...for those countries with good levels of education, but has made growth more difficult for countries with weak levels of education” (Ibid.,p.327). Multinational investment and the revolution in world communication have brought about an enormous momentum to cultural globalisation not least due to the growing influence from institutions representing Western philosophy and values, e.g. IMF and IBRD, (Ibid.,p.328). Carnoy agrees that a

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<sup>78</sup> The transformations as part of the globalisation process in recent years have taken different forms in different places, but there are common features: The spread of liberal democracy, the dominance of market forces, integration in the global economy, the transformation of productions systems and labour markets, the speed of technological change and the media revolution and consumerism (UNRISD 1995:22-30)

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Giddens: “Globalisation refers essentially to that stretching process, in so far as the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth’s surface as a whole”....”the

country's national curriculum will emphasise "...this larger ideological package"(Carnoy 1998:22) that caters to the demands of a global economy.

For countries that are moving from an agrarian-based to a more industry-based economy, globalisation will inevitably have major impacts on the education policy. Governments are being compelled to invite foreign capital and technology in order to increase their competitiveness on regional or international markets. Therefore these countries need human resources in terms of skilled labour force to be able to attract foreign capital. This, in turn, encourages governments to focus on education and training at post-primary level, which will, more often than not, leave out marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities and women, although many women might find employment in a growing informal, industrial sector. Marginalised groups seldom reach secondary level in school. The sociological question is whether expansion of formal schooling and increased enrolment at all three educational levels<sup>80</sup> can eliminate the socio-economic inequalities between the rich and the poor, as well as between the majority and minority cultures that are prevalent in many developing countries. The development economist, Michael Todaro maintains that even if education can have a positive effect on shaping peoples' future the "...educational systems tend to perpetuate, reinforce and reproduce those economic and social structures" (Todaro 2000:342).

From an economic perspective the causality between globalisation and education is to be found in the educational capacity of a country's human resources, and in the way the features associated with adjusting to global demands of the world economy have influenced the educational conditions and possibilities. One of the dimensions of economic rationalism is the preoccupation with education not as a social but as an economic good. Comprehensive studies from the last two decades have shown that the principal source of economic growth in developing countries does not derive from the growth of physical capital but rather from the creation of human capital (Todaro 2000:343). The German Bishops' Conference Research Group reflects a similar position when stating that: "...investing in human capital is at least as important as investing in real assets. Countries which neglect this task are to a certain extent destined to lose out in globalization" (GBCRG, 2000:25)

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intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa" (1996:64)

<sup>80</sup> The largest increase in enrolment is in primary education, and it still accounts for nearly 78% of the total enrolments in Least Developed Countries (LDC) (Todaro 1999:329)

The assumption that formal education is highly instrumental and even necessary to improve the production capacity of the population is the axiom of the human capital theorists. National development of any society goes through the improvement of its population that is its human capital. Thus there is a close connection between the market and the human capital theory. In the 1960s and 1970s it was the dominant theory in conventional development studies, and it was very quickly exported to the rest of the world especially the new, independent states in Sub-Saharan Africa. It still has great political appeal because of its simplistic character: knowledge is the key to prosperity! Education should not be seen as some kind of consumer good but as a productive investment built on the hypothesis that an educated population provides the type of labour force that is necessary for social change and economic growth. In other words education can be perceived as a major agent in producing the skilled manpower for a society in transition to a modern society.

### **3.3.1. The Formation of Human Capital in the Lao PDR**

After having embraced the New Economic Mechanism in 1986, the Lao Government included education in the context of the overall socio-economic development. The Education Policy was announced in 1987 and the major initiatives that were to be taken were to:

...make sciences the productive force in education, train a contingent of cadres in scientific, technological, economic and cultural activities and expand the educational network to include remote mountainous regions and build up a growing contingent of cadres of workers, technicians and teachers of ethnic groups.

(AsDB, 1993:82)

The strategies to achieve these goals are basically motivated by the attempt to: “Undertake human resource development to create a workforce with the capabilities to meet national development needs” (GoL 1994:viii). The priority given to extensive sustainable human development in all sectors, “...points to the welfare of the people, their health conditions, educational standards, and life skills in rural areas” (Ibid.,p.13). Nonetheless, despite the impressive expansion of educational facilities and increase in enrolments during the past 20 years “...the Lao PDR has one of the lowest levels of human resource development in Asia at present” (Thant & Vokes in Than & Tan 1997:161).

The general lack of skilled labour in all sectors at all levels of society in the Lao PDR is hampering the development of a sustainable human resource base. The country’s increased

contact with the international economy demands a modern man - a man who can manage the transformation from a traditional, agricultural society to a society preoccupied with the difficult problems of economic and human resource development. Hence the desire of nurturing the “industrial man”<sup>81</sup> who can meet the demands of the growing industrial sector becomes urgent, a fact that provides justification for large public expenditure on education. More than a third of the public expenditure: 35.6% (Alton et al.1998:74) is being allocated to education and labour market issues as the second largest priority in the Human Resource Development *Précis* for 1998-2001.

One of the major criticisms of the human capital theory is its assumption that the labour market is “a perfect one” (Fägerlind & Saha 1989:49), while in fact “...labor markets are notoriously imperfect, none more so than those of the LDCs” (Perkins et al. 2001:286). This explains that labour policy drawing on the human capital theory shows incapacity to create jobs. According to Fägerlind and Saha the theory does not take into account facts like job satisfaction and reward structure, which might contribute to higher productivity irrespective of education. Other weaknesses are the postulate “...that the key to economic growth lies in individual characteristics” (Fägerlind & Saha 1989:49).

In a communist country like the Lao PDR individualism is not encouraged as cultural and political values and the sense of “collective consciousness” are inculcated in (pre) schools. A general critique of the human capital theory that is also relevant for the Lao PDR is that this imputation of skills and values is in danger of creating a docile and adaptive workforce which raises the question of education as a liberating or repressive factor. This is a problem-complex of a political nature in a pluri-ethnic environment that does not lead to a more equitable society.

According to the human capital theory two requirements are necessary for economic growth: improved and more efficient technology and the utilisation of human resources in the employment of technology. The skills and motivation for productive behaviour are imparted by means of formal education. Proponents of the theory share the narrow concept of the

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<sup>81</sup> In 1986, the late Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane declared that “...the new socialist man has emerged”. The task of the Party was to build “...a new culture having socialist content which reflects a national and popular content while building new people, first of all people filled with patriotism, love for socialism, and socialist internationalism”. “The cause of forming a new man is the noblest cause pursued by us all” (Evans 1995:1). Kaysone wanted to emphasise two things: “forging the industrial man” - in the name of the new economic strategy, and to start a “cultural revolution” (Ibid., p.2). Kaysone’s ambitions are still valid as expressed by

modernisation theorists regarding education as entirely linked to an institution with a fixed curriculum –a curriculum that in many cases only slightly meets the immediate development needs of a disadvantaged population. Another reason is that only a negligible number of people belonging to ethnic minority groups such as in the Lao PDR are in reality involved in any production at the national level at the formal labour market.

Regardless of the criticism that can be directed at the strategy of human capital formation there is no longer any doubt that human beings are the active factor in productivity and economic development. Like most developing countries the Lao PDR has considered the quantitative expansion of educational opportunities-mainly in terms of formal education to be the most appropriate means for rapid national development. Needless to say that the deficiency of semi-skilled and skilled manpower in Third World countries gave rise to the demand for expanding educational opportunities, and seemed justified as well. Despite the difficulties in substantiating statistics from Third World countries “...it seems clear that the expansion of educational opportunities at all levels has contributed to aggregate economic growth” (Todaro 2000:343). In general one of the outcomes of intensified education programmes is an increased number of educated and skilled workers, which again has led to employment and income opportunities for school teachers, construction workers, printers and manufacturers of school uniforms etc. Another positive effect is the creation of an educated class of cadres to fill in administrative and managerial positions at higher levels in the public and private sectors.

However, the belief in the mantra ‘the more education the better’ is being increasingly challenged and has been named “the cult of education” (Todaro 2000:326). Enhanced enrolments in schools in developing countries have by far fulfilled the expected outcomes of improving the standard of living especially for the poor.<sup>82</sup> It is more and more realised in developing societies that the expansion of formal schooling is not always identical with enhanced learning among the pupils. What is just as important as the acquisition of intellectual and practical skills is the attitude-building that is inherent in all school curricula as well as in the teaching methods. Todaro frames the problem this way: “Formal education also imparts values, ideas, attitudes, and aspirations, which may or may not be in the nation’s best

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Khamtay: “The national education system must be upgraded to meet the needs and conditions of the country’s socio-economic development” (Khamtay 1996 p.27)

<sup>82</sup> The lack of formal education opportunities is naturally not the only cause of deficiencies in national development, but a contributing factor.



developmental interests” (Ibid.,p.327) The learners are taught “modern” behaviour and ethics that are validated and necessary in a globalising world.

Notwithstanding the fact that an educated population is a prerequisite for being part of a globalising world, the Lao PDR is squeezed between at least two conflicting ideologies. The dilemma lies in the development of educational models: the need to adopt an individualising and liberalist culture pertaining to the western market-orientated philosophy on the one hand, and a socialist and collective consciousness for building national unity on the other. To add to the complexity, one could also include the fact that half of the population belongs to cultures that in terms of cosmology, social structure and values appear to be inherently opposed to the official socialist ideology; this represents an even bigger challenge for the Lao government.

The discrepancy between so-called traditional and modern values and hence the inequalities in the development of the human resources in the process of “forced” industrialization’ (Livingstone 1997:144) that the peoples of the Lao PDR are experiencing should be seen in light of the political instability that has also influenced the educational history of the country.

### **3.3.2. Minority Education Policy in the Lao PDR after 1975**

Building the capacity of a nation requires development and proper utilisation of the human resources by means of education programmes that are adequate for all citizens. The first phase of the 1975-1985 education policy of “...extension of education to the masses” (Thant & Vokes in Than & Tan 1997:157) was concentrated on quantitative expansion,<sup>83</sup> When the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party government came to power “...it was estimated that less than 2 per cent of the 3 1/2 million population had completed 12 years of education and less than 20 per cent had finished 6 years of elementary schooling. The dismal state of education meant that illiteracy was widespread, and it was especially high among females and ethnic minorities”(Ng Shui Meng in Zasloff & Unger 1991:161).

Unlike government officials of the Royal Lao Government, the Pathet Lao cadres visited the mountain villages, worked with the people and assisted them in constructing schools and wells. “Ethnic minorities for the first time found themselves courted rather than exploited, their skills prized, their grievances recognized” (Stuart-Fox 1997:101-102).

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<sup>83</sup> The expansion encompassed establishment of pre-schools, increased number of primary and secondary schools, as well as enhanced enrolment at all levels. Another form of education that started during this period was non-

Especially primary education was thought to be the appropriate tool for the elimination of illiteracy at the national level by 1987 as stated in the first Five-Year Plan (1981-1985), (Thant & Vokes in Than & Tan 1997:157). A comprehensive literacy campaign was launched with teachers, students and workers conducting literacy classes. Illiteracy was officially declared eradicated in 1984, but many, especially in rural areas, relapsed into illiteracy before they achieved functional literacy.<sup>84</sup> The campaigns were not followed up properly, and outside the towns reading materials were scarce. A UNESCO survey of 15 provinces in 1984-1985 revealed that the illiteracy rate among the 15-45 age group was estimated to be 56 % (Ng Shui Meng in Zasloff & Unger 1991:163), and that the goal of total eradication was not likely to be fulfilled within the following two years.

There were several reasons for the marginal success of the literacy campaign. The communist seizure of power in 1975 had lead to a considerable flight of intellectuals. The government lacked skilled personnel to administer national programmes, and therefore "...education programming was in the hands of local authorities. The result was a proliferation of schools without nationally set standards" (Chamberlain et al. 1995: 55). The ethnic diversity of the country added to the problems. But as the ILO Policy Study stresses "... it is not ethnicity itself that is a barrier to education, but rather the supply of educational services in the provinces » (ILO 1999 :lxxiv). After 1975 the first priority was to expand education, especially primary education, to the masses and the second priority for the communist government was to nationalise education (Thant & Vokes in Than & Tan 1997:157). Recruitment of new teachers to build the new nation was imminent.

The teachers who still remained preferred to stay in urban areas, and the former policy of sending newly trained teachers to the remote areas was unpopular for cultural, family and financial reasons. Nor was the teacher always well received in the village. To extend education services to ethnic minority groups the communist government established boarding colleges for minority teachers, where they could receive training before going back to their villages. If the village was a non-Buddhist village, the leader who chose the teacher trainees would most often

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formal education provided to adults who had been denied access to school during the years of war (Thant & Vokes 1997: 157-59)

<sup>84</sup> There are 11.512 villages in the Lao PDR (Ngaosyvathn in Turton 2000:245). In 1999 there were still approximately 4.000 villages in mountainous areas without a primary school. Out of the country's population 86% live in rural areas (ILO 1999:lxxii).

be a member of the Party, and thus would choose a person susceptible to be politically and ideologically influenced. Nordtveit emphasises the political rationale behind this:

Envoyant dans son village un enseignant bien modelé politiquement – l’enseignement du marxisme est le seul enseignement à être sérieusement dispensé dans les Ecoles Normales, l’Etat élimine les risques de rébellion. Et chacun se trouve donc satisfait: le maître est chez lui, le village qui a récupéré un des siens, et les autorités communistes qui savent pouvoir s’appuyer sur un élément qu’elles ont formé politiquement.

(Nordtveit 1993 :112).

Shaping teachers after communist principles was believed to be an efficient way of consolidating the new state ideology. However, this policy has not had the expected success mainly due to the different cultural environment the minority teachers were exposed to. Nevertheless boarding schools are still a central feature of the new human development policy.

### 3.3.2.1. Minority Education Policy in the New Era

Following the changes in the economic development policy of the Lao PDR in 1993 a Party resolution prepared guidelines for ethnic minority education. This document must be considered as a draft to the first official Human Resource Development *Précis* presented from 1998. The stated objective of this ‘*Human Resources Management Policy for Ethnic Minorities*’ [italics in the original] was:

To boost levels of knowledge for people of ethnic minorities, promote talents, provide vocational and skilled training, to raise awareness.

(ILO 1999:lxix)

Among the directions to be followed are: (i) to develop teachers’ qualifications and capacities, (ii) to identify target boarding schools for ethnic minorities, and (iii) to involve local authorities and ministries to participate in the development of an adequate school system (Ibid.,p.lxix – lxx). The six departments within the Ministry of Education co-operate and are all involved in education for minority groups<sup>85</sup>.

Experiences from other countries with minority populations (e.g. Canada and Australia) have shown that training of teachers from remote areas in provincial centres does not have the planned effect. Many ethnic minority teachers do not complete the training, but return to their

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<sup>85</sup> The six departments are: Department of Administration and Personnel, Dept. of General and Basic Education (DGE), Dept. of Non-Formal Education (NFE), Dept. of Planning and Co-operation, Dept. of Teacher Training and Development (TTD), and Dept. of Vocational, Technical and Higher Education (VTHE).

villages without the required teaching qualifications. Those who do complete prefer to stay in urban areas. (Ovington 1999:3). The Ministry of Education has therefore introduced the “sandwich model”<sup>86</sup> to address the shortage of trained ethnic minority teachers. (Ibid.,p.3).

The boarding schools for minority children have not had greater success than the boarding colleges for minority teachers. Some of the problems with boarding schools are the alienation the children feel being taken away from their own culture, and forced into a different lifestyle. The strict time schedules for the daily activities are not appropriate for ethnic minority children and the dropout rates are very high (ILO 1999:lxvii). Many children in boarding schools are too young to take care of themselves and both children and minority teachers miss classes because of traditional ceremonies back in their respective villages (Chamberlain et al.1995:55).

### **3.3.2.2. Constraints affecting Minority Education in the Lao PDR.**

The factors that influence the education sector can be categorised under different headings. The exogenous influences on the education sector in general is related to the heterogeneity of the population with different cultural values and languages, the low population density which is one of the reasons for establishing boarding schools, and the poor infrastructure. As the Lao PDR is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the Southeast Asian region, the economic state of affairs and government priorities constitute other obstacles for an appropriate and efficient education system. (Thant & Vokes in Than and Tan 1997:174-75). The country is still dependent on foreign aid for the education programmes.

The financial crises that began in Thailand in 1997 had a paradoxical effect on the economy of the Lao PDR; the country’s farmers could reap an advantage as the prices in Thailand for agricultural goods increased together with the new market-oriented policy which allowed Lao exports of agricultural and forest products to Thailand especially through the well-established informal networks. However, the ethnic minority groups living in the mountains are highly dependent on forest products and therefore depletion and the subsequent environmental damage will jeopardise their livelihood. Another by-product of the Thai crisis was that while Lao farmers have become richer through increased production and trade, government employees still do not have sufficient salaries (Chamberlain 1999:xii). The implications for the education sector are serious, and all these constraints are exacerbated among the ethnic

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<sup>86</sup> The future teachers follow studies at teacher training colleges, and these theoretical studies are combined with teaching practice in their home communities.

minority groups. The provincial education offices have inadequate budget allocations, construction of new schools in remote areas has practically stopped, and teachers are insufficiently paid. Especially boarding schools for vulnerable groups like orphans and minority children are affected: the teacher's morale is low, s/he is often not teaching, and the budget is not enough to feed the children properly (Ibid., p.53).

Economics at the micro-level plays a significant constraining role in the Lao PDR, similar to that of many developing countries, especially where *girls' education* is concerned. From a family economic point of view, sending girls to school is perceived to be a futile undertaking. Women and girls' participation in education programmes result in high opportunity costs. Girls and women are seen as not requiring education to perform their social roles - productive as well as reproductive; as expressed by Guttal: "The economic contributions made by women and girls, and the true value of their labour, remains unrecognized" (Guttal 1993:14). In rural areas where nearly all people are engaged in some form of agriculture, men assume the tasks requiring the greatest strength, while women perform a great deal of the tedious, time-consuming and physically demanding work. For example, women mill some 80 % of the rice in rural areas by hand, almost entirely. Women begin assuming household responsibilities much earlier in their lives than men, and over twice as many girls as boys in the 11 to 15 year age group are active in the agricultural sector. Nearly all domestic and child-care duties are performed by women and young girls. For ethnic minorities, who generally are patriarchal societies, the responsibilities of women are even greater. Women in upland communities have to spend even more time on household duties such as gathering firewood, food and water (Ibid., p.7). Nearly 2 million of the total population are women living in rural areas.

The illiteracy rate is highest among women (in rural areas very often more than 80%) and the school enrolment rate, whose figures seldom reflect the actual attendance, is extremely low for girls and women at various levels among ethnic minorities. Furthermore, girls very often marry at a very early age and leave home, denying the natal family returns of educating them, whereas educating boys is considered a long-term investment of precious family resources; their education is more related to "collective" family interests.

Linked to rural families' disinterest in education is the lack of perceived benefits for the girls from the present formal education. Literacy and numeracy are not the most urgent skills for girls to acquire, and educational materials and textbooks often depict women and girls in traditional and subservient roles. "Such stereotypes foster negative attitudes amongst girls towards non-domestic areas, as well as towards pursuing higher education" (Ibid., p.14). The

following statement by the former vice-minister of education underlines that academic studies are not considered as essential for girls:

The Government will establish education programmes directed towards seven target groups: (vii) women, particularly those in rural areas, who are insufficiently educated concerning health and safe motherhood.

(Khamtanh 1995 p.56)

Women, the seventh priority, are the last among the Government's order of concern with regard to general education and in addition to the focus on safeguarding the reproductive role of women.

Another cultural barrier to girls' education is connected to the question of location. If a school is located outside the village many minority groups will be reluctant to let their girls attend school. They are suspicious of changes in socialisation: teachers from different cultural and social backgrounds might influence girls' traditional moral and some parents do not want their daughters to be taught by a male teacher.

These demographic, macro – and microeconomic and cultural dilemmas, however important they are, might not be as serious as the endogenous influences affecting education for the ethnic minority groups. They are of a conceptual and ideological nature. The standard curriculum and teaching methods have little relevance and applicability to their daily lives in the mountains. The inflexible timetable takes no account of the seasons and the workload for children that inevitably affect school attendance. The official language of instruction, Lao, is a second language for ethnic minorities and constitutes another obstacle for a successful education. The results are poor attendance, low attainment and high repetition and drop out rates.

Seen in a historical perspective, consideration towards minority groups and hence their education in the Lao PDR has passed through different stages: from negligence during the French Protectorate and partly during the time of the Royal Lao Government to recognition from the beginning of the communist regime, which has turned into political control.

Despite attempts to reform in terms of the use of minority language as language of instruction and setting aside up to 20% of the curriculum for "...studies appropriate to local area needs"

(Chamberlain et al. 1995:57), education does not appear to be sufficiently relevant for mountain children. Formal education as linked to a classroom is still prevailing.<sup>87</sup>

Given the demographic, geographical and infrastructural conditions of the Lao PDR the establishment of boarding schools seems a reasonable solution as a transitional stage. It is an active commitment to remove educational disparities, a genuine desire to make access to education available for all. However, the philosophy behind the schools might also mirror political and ideological overtones. A government official in the Ministry of Education gave this answer when asked about why minority children should be sent to boarding schools:

« ...pour qu'ils aient du contact avec la civilisation »

(Kanstrup-Jensen 1996:46)

This statement denigrates minority groups as non-civilised people by implying that the lowlanders, Lao Loum, represent *the* civilisation, and that the goal is *laoloumification* of the ethnic minority groups on their way to modernity. Despite the obvious denigration of the richness of cultural pluralism the endeavour to homogenise the population should be seen in relation to the preoccupation with economic development, that is with forging the “new industrial man” (Evans 1995:19) and the need for human capital formation for the demands of the perceived growing labour market. The provision of education for indigenous peoples in the villages as well as in the boarding schools seems to have had limited success in the new modernisation era.

### 3.3.3. Thailand's National Education Act 1999 and the Ethnic Minority Groups

The process of modernisation in Thailand was to some extent brought to a halt due to the crisis in 1997, and the development of human resources became more critical in order to meet the needs of a new century. Therefore the National Education Act, promulgated in 1999, was meant to revamp the education system. The Thai ambitions within the area of education for the new millennium are very high. According to the Education Act, Thailand hopes to see itself “...as an educational hub for the neighbouring countries”<sup>88</sup>. In connection with the formulation of the National Education Act, the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) acknowledges that the economic and social development process in Thailand has been too

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<sup>87</sup> The concept of Non-Formal Education will be discussed in Chapter 5

<sup>88</sup> Retrieved 9. March 2006 from <http://203.150.20.55/beijing/Education%20Policy.htm> (6)

dependant on Western knowledge and know-how and thereby neglected what is labelled “Thai Wisdom”, “Thai Knowledge” or “Indigenous Knowledge”, and the Commission suggests (also in radio programmes and newspapers) that it is time to turn back to the genuine Thai philosophy and culture. The “Thai Knowledge” is categorised in 10 areas of knowledge: agriculture, manufacturing and handicrafts, Thai traditional medicine, natural resources and environment management, community business, community welfare, traditional art, organizational management, language and literature, religion and traditions. (ONEC (a) 1999: 2).

In earlier days, parents took care of the teaching skills, social values and traditions, in the temples the Buddhist monks taught reading and morality, and it was in the palace that the youth could acquire knowledge and preservation of classical art (Ibid.,p.2). The reason for the disappearance of these Thai virtues is the heavy focus on modern knowledge by professional teachers, because of the lack of proper research on indigenous knowledge, and because “...the status of indigenous knowledge specialists was not recognised” (Ibid.,p.2). Thus the Commission strongly pleads for a balance between modern Western science and technology and indigenous knowledge (Ibid.,p.6-7).

As a consequence the Commission suggests the development of a framework for the role of Thai Wisdom through four major plans: 1. Formulation of guidelines on how Thai Wisdom can be integrated into the education system, 2. Research on how Thai Wisdom can be transferred into the content of the learning process, 3. Duty to honour the Thai Wisdom holders as an important teacher in both formal and non-formal education, and 4. Management of Thai Wisdom for education through a Thai Wisdom network (Radio Broadcast 14. July 1999)<sup>89</sup>

In principle, unnamed educational agencies shall mobilize resources in the communities and have them contribute with “...their experience, knowledge, expertise and local wisdom” (GoT, MoE 1999: Chap. 7, Section 57). However, there is no clear indication of who the real custodians of “Indigenous Knowledge” are, and which role they are to play in this revitalisation of the concept, how it will be reflected in the reformed education system, nor who will be considered as proper researchers on and specialists of indigenous knowledge.

Another paper from the Office of National Education Commission does not take the previous suggestions into account, rather it only briefly sketches the framework for the education reform

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<sup>89</sup> Retrieved 9<sup>th</sup> March 2006 from [www.edthai.com/reform/aug.14a.htm](http://www.edthai.com/reform/aug.14a.htm) (p.1-2)



within 3 areas: a) a learning reform consisting of compulsory 12 years of schooling, a more learner-oriented pedagogy in which the learners' analytical skills are to be nurtured, b) a more decentralised administrative financial structure that also allows for more freedom to change the curricula, and c) continuous amendments of the regulations (ONEC (b) 1999:1-3).

In Thailand the ethnic groups are often not specifically mentioned unless they are to be included in "...the handicapped, disadvantaged and school dropouts (UNPD 1999:175). All in all the Thai Human Resource Development and National Education Act 1999 is similar to the Lao Human Resource Development *Précis* from 1998 in the sense that much attention is put on supervision and management of schools in terms of local, regional school boards.

In 2000, a decade after the World Conference of Education for All, a status-meeting was held in Thailand with the participation of the World Bank. As one of the biggest contributors to education in developing countries, the Bank promised on that occasion to double its lending for education in Thailand. The representative agreed with the stated objective of the Education Act that Thailand had "...to develop education systems that are flexible and responsive to the requirements of a fast changing world"<sup>90</sup>. She also underlined that globalisation and market economies will divide nations in successful ones, and those that will become marginalised.<sup>91</sup>

The question of internally marginalised groups, the ethnic minority groups, and the polarisation in developing countries that globalisation might entail, were not mentioned. On the contrary the representative stressed the role of education as an important contributor in reducing inequality and poverty in societies.<sup>92</sup>

The education reform's objectives of diminishing the existing inequalities and making education pragmatic must be said to be an unfinished business in the development process. The realities of bureaucratic inertia, conservative thinking and lack of genuine political interest is

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<sup>90</sup> Speech held by Ms. Ruth Kaiga, Head of Human Development Network, World Bank. Retrieved from [www.moe.go.th/English/speech2.htm](http://www.moe.go.th/English/speech2.htm) (p.4)

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.,p.4

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.,p.4

still impeding the realisation of the good intentions in the education reform, an inertia that cannot only be explained by the imperative of short- term crisis management.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Development and the social changes it brings along have become an intensified global enterprise. The new international system that follows "...an increasingly rapid circulation of money, people, goods, electronic impulses, and ideas" (McMichael 1996:xvii) has added to the economic and political complexity in the relationship between the West and the Third World countries. A new development discourse and other strategies are needed as well as greater acknowledgement of the vulnerability and marginalisation of still larger population groups in order to reduce the growing polarisation; rhetorical assurances are unsatisfactory. However, because of the unequal power relationship development theories that are used to elucidate the evolution in Third World countries are dominated by Western thinking. McMichael expresses it this way: "Western developmentalism takes its cue from an economic model driven by technology and market behavior rather than from existing cultures" (Ibid.,p.11). Western(ised) researchers who attempt to give voice to excluded population groups in culturally heterogeneous Third World countries will therefore inevitably face both theoretical and methodological dilemmas.

The first part of this chapter is a brief reflection on some theoretical approaches that could be relevant to shed light on the study of the problematique concerning human development among the minority groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand. Although the two countries adhere to different political and economic systems they both face problems as far as their minority populations are concerned. On the one hand both governments do not fully observe the international declarations of rights for indigenous population groups. On the other hand it could be argued that the changed economic conditions as a result of the new open door policy followed by the Lao PDR and Thailand's status as the Fifth East Asian Tiger (Robert Muscat) force the governments to prioritise unity and nationalism at the expense of rights declarations and cultural diversity.

The second part is a discussion on different methodological approaches that might be appropriate for undertaking research based, as far as possible, on the terms of the indigenous peoples themselves. The discussion will concentrate on the legacy of colonial research, the axiom of value freedom, and the limitations of participation as well as the possibility of power equalisation between the sample populations and the outside researcher.

The third section is a presentation of the main features of the groups under study followed by a presentation of the sample populations in the two countries.

The last part of the chapter is a description of the research methods that will be applied.

#### 4.1. Theoretical Perspectives

Western hegemony might be challenged on ideological grounds but “...its economic and political hegemony is still predominant in world politics” (Hersh in Schmidt & Hersh 2000:209). Proof is found in the development problematic in Third World countries. The earlier stated unevenness in the development process in the cases of the Lao PDR and Thailand left their minority groups in a developmental void, as perceived from a Western perspective. The new path chosen by the communist Lao PDR represents an ideological challenge as the country clings to socialism but is now engaging in international relations based on free market principles. Other dilemmas are the inner conflicts that mainly pertain to the difficulties related to the existing cultural diversity. As for capitalist Thailand, the ambition is to retain its position as an active player in regional and world economics, which exacerbates the socio-economic unevenness internally. Both during the rapid economic growth before and after the 1997 crisis, the disadvantaged groups have been left behind. The Lao PDR and Thailand are incorporated in the international structures while being autonomous states with large population groups excluded from the national socio-economic and political life. To analyse the situation of the two states’ dealing with their inner dilemmas an array of pertinent theoretical approaches seem appropriate to be examined.<sup>93</sup>

In choosing a theoretical framework:”...it should nevertheless be remembered that theory in social science is not neutral” as pointed out by Jacques Hersh (Ibid., p. 199). Hersh’s statement on the question of neutrality is in line with Robert Cox’s statement: “Theory is always *for* some one, and *for* some purpose” (cited in Hersh p.199). Cox belongs to the body of Marxist-influenced critical social scientists. One of the key concerns of this theoretical school is the notion of emancipation, although the interpretation of the concept is rather unclear. In agreement with the above statement of partiality, this dissertation seeks to investigate possibilities of challenging the status of minority peoples as oppressed groups and hence find ways of “emancipatory change” (Hobden & Jones in Baylis & Smith 2001:212) as citizens in the Lao PDR and Thailand. Emancipation of indigenous population groups could be considered

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<sup>93</sup> Charles Ragin goes so far as to claim:” This openness to the viewpoints of low-status and low-visibility people may expose the inadequacies of existing theoretical perspectives” (1994:46)

from a class point of view in keeping with the Marxist position within critical theory. This notwithstanding the normative nature of the human development paradigm should in principle revolve around the emancipation of oppressed groups.

The intensified attention towards the world's marginalised people and the way theories and strategies are created could be phrased as "the human rights rationale". Under this umbrella one might gather the theories and strategies that solicit more *ethical development* approaches and the quest for increased global, moral responsibility. Likewise *empowerment theory* as one of the most well-known examples of an alternative development strategy can be used as a point of departure to the extent that it offers concrete strategies of emancipation and inclusion of disadvantaged groups in all kinds of societies. Another concrete and more revolutionary approach that is especially applicable to human development issues and emancipation is *liberation theory* developed by the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire. The above mentioned theoretical and strategic approaches all have a similar *modus operandi* in dealing with development of and with marginalised people.

The stress on "emancipatory change" for disadvantaged groups justifies a research strategy of giving the researched populations an active role; conformed with this objective, the empirical data is of pivotal significance in this dissertation. Both theoretical conceptualisation and empirical evidence are essential dialectical components of any analytical research, yet the connection between the two is often regarded as trespassing each other's territories.

Derek Layder advocates a broader understanding and use of theories within new strategies in social research. He argues that "...in any research project there *should be*[italics in the original] room for more qualitative, open-ended forms of theory (rather than the ones that narrowly specify the relations between precisely measurable variables)" (Layder 1993:15). Concerning the interpretation of data, Layder encourages the researcher to be flexible when s/he interprets the findings from the empirical research, and "...adopt theoretical ideas which fit the data collected during the research rather than collecting data that fit a preconceived hypothesis or theoretical idea" (Ibid., p. 20). He supports the idea that theories emerge from confrontation with reality. As an example of this he mentions *grounded theory*, whose "...aim is to develop theory and concepts from the data as the research unfolds" (Ibid.,p. 19).

In fact, grounded theory is an indication of the symbiotic relationship between theory and research methodology: the importance of the process of the qualitative research and the absence of speculation on how data fit into prevailing theories. Some ideas and tools from grounded theory are highly applicable in research on cultural phenomena and widely used by researchers working with indigenous populations whose conceptualisations, interpretations of and theories on e.g. health and education differ from non-indigenous and Western understanding. Finally, i.e. grounded theory can be seen as a clear expression of the vision of the researcher, why s/he has undertaken this study and *for whose* purpose.

#### 4.2. In Search of Applicable Methodologies

The above-described broad understanding of theories and the openness to various interpretations in connection with empirical research is expressed in Strauss' and Corbin's rather loose understanding of methodology as "A way of thinking about and studying social reality" (Strauss & Corbin 1998:3). This definition does not confine the Western(ised) researcher to orthodox procedures, and this is exactly why s/he is forced to reflect upon the impact of research among indigenous populations. Just as the researcher chooses a theory *for* a certain purpose, s/he is also fully aware that the chosen research methodology is *for* some one. In order to give voice to the excluded, the outside researcher's ingrained ethnocentric assumptions are challenged, as well as s/he has to deal with a number of ethical dilemmas.

Seen from a non-Western perspective, there is little doubt that Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a scholar born into an indigenous culture, raises an important point when she claims that "... the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (Smith 2004:1). Despite the heterogeneity that also exists among different indigenous groups, the paradigms used by researchers through history have left deep scars in people's minds. Research *on* indigenous peoples has silenced and misinterpreted indigenous languages, knowledge and cultures if not totally ridiculed and condemned them in academic discourses (Ibid.,p.20)<sup>94</sup>. Therefore the reader of this study should not be surprised by the researcher's claim that the purpose of the study was to give voice to the indigenous peoples themselves. The spontaneous outburst from the village chief, Sohtou, during the welcoming ceremony influenced my train of thought in connection with the research:

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<sup>94</sup> Concerning the use of theory, Linda Tuhiwai Smith expresses a similar critique: "Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory. Any consideration of the ways our origins have been examined, our

*“Have you come to ask me? Normally people come and tell us what to do”*<sup>95</sup>

This type of reaction demands that the researcher recognises the negative consequences research (as well as development related activities) has had on indigenous peoples. The outside researcher is left in a vacuum as far as theoretical and methodological paradigms are concerned; s/he is no longer on the safe ground of a Western university compound, and in the search of suitable approaches s/he has to face the many challenges which are first and foremost of an ideological and ethical nature.

The researcher is confronted with questions of *neutrality* and *value freedom*. Historically speaking the misconception that research is value free undoubtedly stems from the methodological, positivistic principles of natural sciences. “The myths of value-free inquiry and the non-normative role of the researcher have led to the dehumanising and catastrophic utilisation of knowledge” (Tandon 1982:20).

In fact, according to Howard Becker the question of neutrality is a pseudo problem. This dilemma, he argues, does not exist, because it is a false assumption to believe that it is possible to do research that “...is uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies” (Becker 1967:239). Therefore it is not a question of taking sides, but rather: “Whose side we are on?” (Ibid.). We can never avoid taking sides. He contends that choosing sides is an implicit feeling, rooted, not in the fact that the researcher adheres to a certain sociological school of thought, but that s/he is deeply influenced by existing social contexts. The argument can be made that schools of thought are influenced by the social and political structures under whose authority they develop. Tuhiwai Smith agrees: “ In other words, research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (Smith 2004:5). Researchers open themselves and others when giving credence to subordinate groups in society. As examples of bias, Becker uses research carried out in e.g. schools, hospitals and prisons. If the researcher tries to substantiate the truth in statements expressed by subordinates e.g. pupils, patients and drug addicts, and not the statements of the professional authorities i.e. teachers, doctors and police officers (who

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histories recounted, our arts analysed, our cultures dissected, measured, torn apart and distorted back to us will suggest that theories have not looked sympathetically or ethically at us” (2004:38)

<sup>95</sup> Sohtou (55), Ban Houaytoumay, Lao PDR. 2000. All taped and written (in Lao, Thai and English) interviews from 2000 and 2001 have been printed out and are available on request. The parenthesis following the name indicates the age of the interviewee. All direct quotations from the interviewees are shown in italics, whereas transcribed stories are not italicised. All narratives and responses from the researched villages are presented with single line spacing.

themselves are levers in the hierarchy), s/he has challenged the existing power and authority relations of the established order in the society. In Becker's term this phenomenon is due to the "notion of a hierarchy of credibility" (Ibid.,p.241). As a consequence only those who take the side of the powerless will risk being accused of bias.

Field research<sup>96</sup> (e.g. research involving interviews, narratives and observation), where the powerless are at the centre stage, can be determined as a subset of qualitative research. And as a subset of field research the researcher can find inspiration from the naturalistic or ethnographic paradigm that seems applicable in human and social sciences.

The characteristics of the naturalistic inquiry are dependent on axioms<sup>97</sup> that underlie the paradigm as well as the different characteristics of this paradigm form a synergetic entity. Each period has its own unique set of "basic beliefs" or metaphysical principles "...in which its adherents believed and upon which they acted" (Lincoln & Guba 1985:15).

The axioms concerning value-freedom<sup>98</sup> and the relationship between the researcher/inquirer and the interviewees are of specific interest when carrying out research among indigenous peoples. The positivist claim that inquiry should be value-free (i.e. free from social, cultural or individual norms, from theories or hypotheses) by choosing an 'objective' (factual-based) methodology, that is supposed to remove all subjective (value-laden) elements from the inquiry situation, is impossible in e.g. naturalistic inquiries. Selecting a methodology is *an sich* a value-bound decision. Like Becker, Schwandt (cited in Lincoln & Guba) argues that neutrality in the choice of methodologies is an illusion. While conventional inquirers admit that personal preferences are determinants of the choice among methods, they only reluctantly admit that moral choices in fact precede scientific research and development. It is also absurd to claim that political decisions influenced by the findings of scientific research are value free (Lincoln & Guba p.171-73). By opting for the naturalistic paradigm the inquirer therefore accepts that the choice of topic to be investigated, as well as its boundaries, and the selection of interviewee groups is the result of her/his personal values and ideological standpoint – as is the choice of paradigm itself.

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<sup>96</sup> The researcher acknowledges that research is an ongoing daily practice among farmers and indigenous peoples, but this chapter only discusses some conceptual and behavioural considerations that the Western researcher has to deal with.

<sup>97</sup> "Axioms are defined as a set of undemonstrated "basic beliefs" accepted by convention or established by practice as the building blocks of some conceptual or theoretical structure or system" (Lincoln & Guba 1985:33)

<sup>98</sup> "...a value is simply that criterion, or touchstone, or perspective that one brings into play, implicitly or explicitly, in making choices or designating preferences" (Lincoln & Guba 1985 p.160-61).



Another element pertaining to the value discussion is the congruence in culture between the inquirer and the group involved in the research. This poses the danger that the inquirer “goes native” (Ibid.,p.177) – a kind of overidentification of the inquirer with the cultural values of the researched population. The researcher who is conscious that s/he has chosen side must be prepared to deal with the critique that may come from the academic world. Values are the basics of ideology and the implication of the inquiry being value resonant with all influential sources must be that the researcher openly acknowledges her/his ideological standpoint, and thereby accepts that the outcome of an inquiry serves someone’s agenda. The naturalistic paradigm claims, and rightly so, that “One has no choice about representing *some* [italics in the original] ideology – one cannot be alive without one” (Lincoln & Guba 1985:185). Thus the naturalistic paradigm is not an addendum to orthodox research. The axiology, the roles of values in inquiry (Ibid.,p.38), and hence the openly confessed ideological position, constitute the biggest difference.

The naturalistic paradigm differs from orthodox research in the fact that the inquirer and the “object” of inquiry interact and are interdependent. It is a question of *authenticity in the relationship* between the interviewer and the interviewee. In this particular case one must ask whether the interviewer is intruding in a community or whether her/his presence is an opportunity for the interviewees? To create an optimal research environment it first of all puts demands on the researcher in terms of time, energy and resources. S/he must become a part of the local environment to the extent that her/his presence is no longer a disturbance. Nevertheless, no matter how adaptable the researcher is, s/he is an outsider, and building the necessary trust and authentic communication patterns is one of the main challenges in naturalistic inquiry. Some research designs and data collection techniques are more conducive for interaction than others (e.g. qualitative vs. quantitative methods, discussions and talks vs. questionnaires). When carrying out research among peoples who have got few if any and maybe even bad experiences with “intruding” consultants, researchers and the like, the co-operation and trust between the parties is of vital importance. “If the reciprocal relationship of investigator and interviewees is ignored, the data that emerge are partial and distorted, their meaning largely destroyed” (Ibid.,p.105). To put so much effort in maintaining a high level of interaction will be seen by some as being done at the expense of objectivity. Can the investigator be trusted when s/he is given “methodological *carte blanche*”?[italics in the original] (Ibid., p.108) Here one is tempted to argue that critics persist in the grip of old “legitimate” [my accentuation] paradigms. The novelty in the naturalistic paradigm is of a

conceptual nature whose most significant feature perhaps lies in the change from a hierarchic to a heterarchic (i.e. the shift from the rule by one to several rules by some) concept of order (Ibid., p.51). The interaction, interdependency and the trust between the researcher and the researched population are where this landslide in authority and control is most noticeable.

The axioms of the naturalistic paradigm, of which the ones that seem the most relevant in carrying out research among indigenous peoples are discussed above, are guidelines for this research. In relation to the study of education and human development among indigenous peoples, responses cannot be found outside the community itself. The attention of the researcher cannot be confined to a few variables of interest that can be controlled from outside. The nature of indigenous learning practices and concepts must be observed and discussed *in situ*. The main purpose of spending time in the community is to build authenticity in the relationship between the parties. Likewise the naturalistic approach also maintains that the researcher ought to spend some time in the setting before s/he can identify the focus of the research in a proper manner, and before s/he can specify how relevant data are best obtained (Ibid.,p.43). This might be true in some cases, and especially what concerns the possible theory (e.g. grounded theory). On the other hand it could also be argued that the topic for investigation itself is chosen on the basis of assumptions (not to be mistaken for theories), based on previous empirical experiences, and that the aim of the research process is to substantiate these assumptions.

The reason behind the naturalistic approach's preference for qualitative research methods<sup>99</sup> is related to doubts of the significance of quantitative methods, but mainly because qualitative methods are highly dependent on human interaction, and not on capital-intensive techniques. Qualitative research is often used in anthropological and ethnographic studies when cultural and historical phenomena are described and interpreted. The study of education and human development among indigenous peoples leans towards the sciences, where the role of informants as narrators is of decisive importance. The techniques applied in qualitative research are often differently structured than other kinds of research, and the strategy can be developed in co-operation with the community. In the selection of the sample population participating in the study, the researcher chooses according to her/his objectives (e.g. giving

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<sup>99</sup> "Qualitative research is a basic strategy of social research that usually involves in-depth examination of a relatively small number of cases" (Ragin 1994:190)

voice to a certain group, a personal interest in a specific phenomenon, to establish representativeness etc.) (Ragin 1994 p.85-86).

In conventional research, knowledge and theories can be a barrier for this type of inquiry in the sense that the responses from empirical data are expected to verify or falsify what can be deducted from the theory. In contrast, in the naturalistic paradigm, as a proponent of anti-positivism "...investigators are exhorted to enter the field with as few preconceptions as possible, relying on an accumulation of impressions which, with the aid of a facilitative human mind, eventually speak for themselves, so that new theories emerge from the real world" (Seale, 1999:23). The inductive approach, where the concepts and practices observed and learned by means of observations and interviews is therefore deemed the most valuable in this kind of empirical research.

One of the major critiques against this method is its pretension to be subjective and thereby it cannot be taken seriously. But then one can argue that theory development is equally subjective (Lincoln & Guba 1985:203-4). Although most research according to Ragin contains both deductive and inductive elements (Ragin 1994 p.46-47), this deliberate openness that challenges the conventional research thinking by advancing new theories seems to be appropriate in doing research with excluded groups such as indigenous peoples.

Naturally this choice of open-mindedness evokes the question of *trustworthiness*. Will the audience/reader find the results of the study worth paying attention to, does the interpretation and analysis depict the truth? As is the case in another alternative approach, the participatory research, sceptics ask 1) how we can be confident about the truth 2) can the findings be applied to other contexts or with other groups of people, 3) would the findings be repeated if another group was asked the same questions and finally: 4) can we be sure that the findings are determined by the people involved in the research and not by the bias and motivation of the investigator (Pretty 1995:1255). No matter which label one puts on the respective questions from both conventional researchers and further developed parallel criteria by adherents of participatory approaches, the core of the matter is first and foremost that the question of trustworthiness is brought more into focus in alternative research methodologies. This has led to development of other "goodness criteria" (Ibid.,p. 1255-56) in connection with participatory approaches. The authenticity criteria are meant to help in evaluating the impact of the inquiry process on the people e.g. "Have people been changed by the process?" (Ibid.,p.1255-56).

The participatory approach with its distinctive altruistic character advocating social justice and equality can be seen as a supplement or enrichment to the naturalistic research paradigm. Participatory research is not value neutral, but is ideologically committed to the weakest, thus “...gathering of knowledge should not be governed by value-neutrality but by clarity of purpose in the work being performed” (Fals Borda 1998:190). A paradigm is more than a theory or a model since conventional research and its ascribed legitimacy is of an oppressive nature. The term “participatory”<sup>100</sup> has been monopolised, used and especially misused by researchers, development consultants and practitioners as well as by policy makers during the last 20-30 years when dealing with e.g. marginalised communities.

Many of the methods from conventional research are used in participatory research but adapted to the shift in power and control. The main difference lies in the fact that the visibility of the researcher and the transparency of her/his intentions are significantly greater than in conventional research (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995:1672). The researcher has taken the point of view that the ultimate goal of research should be a fundamental transformation and improvement of those involved through increased knowledge. Ideologically one has to ask for whom is the knowledge generated and who makes use of it? Therein lays *the dichotomy of knowledge*: is the enhanced knowledge acquired during the process available to the researcher only for her/his own professional objectives or is it for the benefit of the people involved? Because the researcher in classical research is completely in control of the process s/he is prone to feel neither accountable nor responsible for the generated knowledge to individuals, groups, organisations, nor is s/he accountable to the communities involved.

Ideally the process in the various participatory approaches is supposed to demonstrate the moral aspect of the methods. First, the recognition of indigenous education practices and concepts as deemed worthy of research in their own right enhances the consciousness about the complexity, variety and value of indigenous knowledge referred to by some as ‘ethnoscience’ – (Chambers, 1983:82) for both the indigenous peoples and the researcher. Second, the researcher is not generating new knowledge in co-operation with the community members, but it is a mutual learning and consciousness-raising process. The interviewees learn by formulating the concepts of education in a historical perspective. The challenge for the researcher is to engage in “reversal in learning” (Ibid.,p.201), or as phrased by Ragin: “Thus,

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<sup>100</sup> ”Participatory research is most commonly described as an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work and action” (Hall 1981:6 in *Convergence Vol 14. No 3*).

researchers may have to relinquish or ‘unlearn’ ...” (Ragin 1994:44). Alternatives to conventional research begin with the assumption that “...the rural poor are ‘voiceless’ not because they have nothing to say, but because nobody cares to listen to them” (Fernandes & Tandon 1982:3). Sitting, asking and listening are as much an attitude as a method. It implies that the outsider is the student who must show patience, humility and respect.

Reversals and its many dimensions were already introduced in the 1980s as a new professionalism in the development discourse. One of its most ardent advocates is Robert Chambers who claims that “...reversals in space, in professional values, and in specialisation” (Chambers 1983:169) will help appreciate the “...under-recognised resources” (Ibid., p.168) that exist among the world’s poor and marginalised. The polar values between the “first” (rich, influential, educated, urban, developed, modern, western) and the “last” (poor, powerless, illiterate, rural, under-developed, traditional, indigenous) populations are not only value-loaded words, but they reflect the professional preferences, technologies, research and development programmes of the core in opposition to peripheral groups (Ibid.,p.171-173). Chambers further argues:”Reversals require professionals who are explorers and multidisciplinary” (Ibid.,p.168). However, being exploratory and multidisciplinary demand courage and renunciation of the protection of established theories, which often create difficulties for Western(ised) researchers whose intellectual development and behaviour are nurtured in conformity with Western norms and professional partiality.

Reversal in learning leads to the question of power that is central in participatory research. The skewed power distribution between the researcher and the sample population in conventional research is replaced in participatory research by a more horizontal line of communication. The *power equalisation* means that the domination-dependency relations are sought eliminated. By affirming that people’s inherent knowledge is valuable, the sample population is no longer the ‘object’ for investigation but the ‘subject’. The term ‘researcher’ should therefore refer to both members of the community as well as to the outside researcher. The emphasis is on people as “experts in their own right” (Holland & Blackburn 1998:39). If not all members of an indigenous community participate in the discussions and if the community itself chooses the interviewees, it may well be prominent members who speak on behalf of the whole community. The question of internal power relations in the community, however, is not relevant when seeking to gain more knowledge about indigenous education practices since everybody is part of this learning system.

Indigenous peoples are experts in their own education system and “...the researcher studies a group not simply to learn more about it, but also to contribute to its having an expressed voice in society” (Ragin, 1994:43). This is the main reason for favouring a participatory approach. Methodologies that not only involve disenfranchised groups in the research, but also entirely build on the statements and explanation of the local researchers are *empowering* in themselves as well as they enhance the *conscientisation* process. ‘Conscientização’ is according to the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire the designation for the process of becoming aware of one’s condition. Education is the means to fuel the liberation process among the oppressed people. (Fägerlind & Saha 1989:25-26).

However, by giving the voice to indigenous peoples to expand on their own education systems encouraged by the recognition from the outside researcher the conscientisation process is of a different character. In contrast with non-indigenous, education programmes aiming at self-liberation where conscientisation is perceived as an induced event, the individual or collective conscientisation in participatory methodology will – when properly carried out – occur spontaneously. It might make people conscious of being exploited and powerless. But first of all it should make them conscious of the relevance and true value of their learning practices and culture and thereby give them the confidence to make a stand against the typified theories of indigenous peoples as “backwards peasant farmers” (Loomis 2000:896).

Western researchers and development practitioners most often use participatory methods in connection with solutions of practical poverty-related issues such as improved farming techniques, access to drinking water for the whole community etc. and thereby involving marginalised groups, e.g. women.<sup>101</sup>

In spite of the constraints pertaining to participatory methods they offer the necessary opportunities for changing roles and control in the research process. The most important distinction between participatory research methodologies and conventional research is thus a philosophical one. “Ultimately participatory research is about respecting and understanding the people with whom and for whom researchers work” (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995:1675). The concept has inherent ethical and ideological/political foundations. The *ethics* lie in the goal of the research, the attitude of the outside researcher and the accountability towards the indigenous community. The outside researcher should function as a catalyst in making their voice heard. Despite the leading role that is often ascribed to the outsider by Third World

populations (another imperialist legacy), a domineering personality would have difficulties in successfully completing any kind of participatory methods.

Many researchers have shied away from participatory research because they consider it a *political process*, but “...research in social settings have always been political. It either maintains, explains or justifies the *status quo* [italics in the original] or questions it, though the researcher may not take an active part in changing it” (Tandon 1982:33). Getting involved in research efforts that aim at assisting the less powerful and marginalised makes the process inevitably political. Ideological standpoints preclude neutrality. The outside researcher might not take an active part in changing the conditions for the indigenous populations, but during the conscientisation process s/he is involved in the reinforcement of an existing indigenous capacity for collective analysis. Continuously nurtured by internal and external change agents, this kind of development related research would lead to greater equality and justice in field research.

In sum the ethical, ideological/political standpoints as well as the attitude of the researcher determine the choice of methodological approaches. To give voice to underprivileged population groups in scientific research is according to Ragin “...clear in its objective” (Ragin 1994:45), although scholars who remain devoted to more conventional research approaches might contest this aim. A research study that mainly intends to build on the researched populations’ own explanation of the practice and concept of education and human development requires unorthodox approaches, and once the researcher has admitted whose side s/he is on, different field research methods offer valuable guidance. The researcher can only hope that her/his attitude and approach eventually will lead to a greater conscientisation among the people themselves.

A female interviewee in one of the researched villages, expressed a modest example of a positive effect after completion of the 2-step field research by saying:

*“ Last year I was shy, but now I know that a Westerner/foreigner is really interested in knowing about my culture, and that has taught me to that I should be proud of my traditional culture”*<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The constraints related to these approaches are well-known in terms of e.g. too time-consuming, creation of expectations that are not fulfilled, enthusiasm from the community wanes etc.

<sup>102</sup> 2001 p.11 (Referring to the field research in 2001 followed by the page number in the transcribed interviews)

To provide an insight in this young girl's culture the following pages give an overview of important characteristics of the way of life among the Hmong and Akha groups. The descriptions of the main features of the two cultures draw on statements from members of the respective groups themselves, as well as the results of previous research studies.

### 4.3. The Ethnic Groups under Study: Hmong and Akha in the Lao PDR and Thailand

The northern parts of Burma, Thailand, the Lao PDR, Vietnam as well as Southwest China form a geographical entity generally known as the Southeast Asian Massif. Its highlands have, for centuries, provided refuge for relatively small communities that constitute various indigenous groups. Early Western interest in these mountain peoples coincided with the emergence of anthropology and ethnography as academic disciplines and was in keeping with the cultural trend of exoticism. Large numbers of articles and books were written about mountain tribes in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Western observers were beginning to recognise the cultural and linguistic uniqueness of these minorities.<sup>103</sup>

#### 4.3.1. Features of the Ethnic Groups under Study

Among the peoples inhabiting the mountainous regions the **Hmong** groups (the largest groups belonging to the Hmong-Mien ethnolinguistic superstock) are probably the most recent migrants – originally from China – to have settled in the areas of the Southeast Asian Massif.<sup>104</sup> (Map 6)

As for the **Akha** groups belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese speaking peoples the corpus of literature is scarce. The probable homeland of the Akha is the mountainous Southeastern Yunnan, China.<sup>105</sup> (Map 7)

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<sup>103</sup> E.g. The first scholarly work on the Hmong was published in 1924 by the French missionary François-Marie Savina (Culas C. & Michaud J. 1997:227). A "proto-ethnographic" description of the ethnic groups living in the northernmost border areas of Siam had been published in Thai language in 1886 (Winichakul in Turton 2000:45) and on mountain peoples in Laos in 1904 (Ibid., p.48)

<sup>104</sup> The first Western record of a Hmong presence in the Indochina Peninsula dates from 1860. Some Hmong sources suppose that the Hmong first moved into Laos in 1810-20 (Yang Dao cited in Lewis, J. 1992: 264). The first presence of Hmong settlements in Thailand is not documented before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to different sources the Hmong did not settle in Northern Thailand until 1880-85 (Culas & Michaud 1997:224-25). Research on the Hmong was intensified after the Second World War primarily in Thailand and Laos. Political changes in the region, however, put a stop to research carried out by Western researchers for some years. As the only country of the area Thailand welcomed assistance and researchers from the West. The historical set of circumstances explains why the majority of academic studies published on the Hmong in Asia still today is based on fieldwork where the smallest contingent of this group live, Thailand and the Lao PDR (Ibid.,p.213 )

<sup>105</sup> The Tibeto-Burmese speakers came in different periods between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Chazée 1999:133). However, the majority of them are known to have arrived in Laos in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the latest migrations are supposed to have taken place in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Chamberlain et al.



As stated previously the minority groups in the Lao PDR constitute approximately half of the total population and of these groups the Hmong peoples, the largest of the Hmong-Mien groups and the Akha groups, the largest of the Sino-Tibetan groups form respectively about 6,9% and 1,4% of the people living in the mountains.<sup>106</sup>

In Thailand the hill areas populations constitute 1,5% of the total population. The Hmong groups constitute the second largest and the Akha groups the fourth largest minority group counting for respectively 17,9% and 8% of the mountain peoples.<sup>107</sup>

#### 4.3.1.1. Main Features of the Hmong Culture

The history of the **Hmong** groups is characterised by oppression, persecution and migration in China and later for a great number of people from the Hmong groups in Laos, which have been contributing factors to the economic and political *independence* which is the predominant characteristic of the various Hmong groups. Throughout history the Hmong have fought to preserve their independence in armed struggles (e.g. with other minority groups when settling in the mountainous areas in Laos in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they refused to pay tax to the French authorities during the Protectorate (1893-1949)), as well as during the Second Indochina War (1964-73)<sup>108</sup>. Another example of the Hmong groups' strong sense of independence should be seen in their reaction to the communist seizure of power in the Lao PDR in 1975. In this connection Paul Lewis is clear in his interpretation: "...in Laos many Hmong were bitter anti-Communist fighters seeing in Communism a distinct threat to their independence" (Lewis P.1984:10). The deputy head in the Thai Hmong village told a rather popular but fictitious story about the Hmong originating from Mongolia. When the Chinese conquered Mongolia, some Hmong surrendered, but those who sought independence emigrated to Laos and Thailand.<sup>109</sup>

Hmong sources state that their name means "man" or "human being" as opposed to "spirit" (Yang Dao cited in Lewis, J. 1992:253). According to the Hmong cosmology there is a

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1995:16). From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they started to migrate slowly into Northern Thailand from Burma (Lewis P. 1998:9, 204)

<sup>106</sup> The Hmong form the largest minority group in Xaysomboun, Special Region, and the second largest group in 4 other provinces (AsDB, Lao PDR Country Report 2000:18-19). The Akha groups don't constitute the largest group in any province, but the second largest of the minority groups in Louang Nam Tha province (Ibid.,p.21-22)

<sup>107</sup> The Hmong groups live in at least 13 provinces in Thailand, whereas the Akha groups live in 4 provinces with the biggest concentration in Chiang Rai province (CONTO 1999:15)

<sup>108</sup> The First Indochina War was against the French

spiritual reality, a world of spirits, ancestors and souls, behind the material one, and accept of the existence of another sphere outside the one that is immediately perceptible, other powers that influence the life of the individual and the community<sup>110</sup>. The *Weltanschauung* of the Hmong is in reality a total view of how the world operates – it is in their science, mythology, genealogy, history and penal code. As in all original religions, aetiological genesis myths with cosmic phenomena as actors constitute a considerable part of the Hmong learning processes. The Blacksmith in the Thai Hmong village told the myth about the first man Duangaathit (which means “sun”), also called Jua, and the first woman Duangjan (which means “moon”) or Na, who were born to love each other, but Duangjan fell sick and died. The story is told to explain that “...if they [the Hmong couple] have loved each other strongly, they will be born again as sun and moon, and they can stay together forever”.<sup>111</sup> Without knowledge of these systems of belief and explanation, Hmong lose an important source of information of themselves and their place in history”(Yang Dao cited in Lewis J.1992:279). They believe in “...a being with undefined powers, called ‘sky’” (Ibid.,p.273). Cultures are non-static, and the belief in a kind of messianic ‘supreme being’ is a genuine feature of the Hmong culture. This might explain why some Hmong have converted into Christianity, because syncretism takes place over time when societies and cultures interact.

The Hmong society is forged around groups and not individuals. “The family, the clan and the lineage group are the three fundamental pillars of Hmong society” (Ibid., p.290). In general, child rearing among the Hmong groups is gender-specific. “The boys learn social patterns and techniques of agriculture from their father, while the mother teaches the girls about household duties and the women’s role in the extended family”(Ibid.,p.281). Both sons and daughters are valued in the sense that they each play a role in linking the family to other groups, although it is the sons who bring home their wives, because “In addition to family unity, great importance [is paid to] exogamous patrilineal clan socio-political network” (Chazée 1999:106). Children are members of their father’s clan. Because of exogamy there is no blood connection, but clan members believe they are descendants of an ancestral pair and therefore they belong to the

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<sup>109</sup> Shortened version of the story told by Mr. Solanan Saengprasert (47), Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam, Thailand, 2000 p.37

<sup>110</sup> Mr. Ly Heu in Ban Denkang, Lao PDR illustrates the Hmong thought world by saying: “*They[the Hmong] should preserve their own customs, because when they die their spirit will go to the Hmong world as it was practiced by their ancestors*” (2000 p.9).

<sup>111</sup> Shortened version of the myth told by Mr. Jongcheng Saewa (74), Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam, Thailand, (2000 p.21-22)

same lineage group (in Hmong language: ‘branch, root’- Yang Dao cited in Lewis, J. 1992:290). Another myth about the first couple, Jua and Na, illustrates this:

“When they had finished creating everything, they had a son with 12 fingers. They cut all 12 fingers to be surnames such as Saelee, Saewang, Saelao etc. So all humans in the world are fingers of this son. Therefore people cannot be married to the person who has the same surname”<sup>112</sup>

The people in villages in the Lao PDR are not so used to questions from foreigners, and therefore the interviewees were mainly encouraged to tell their own story.<sup>113</sup> As part of her story an interviewee provided this anecdote:

“She could not live with a man from her clan, because they have the same ancestor...After getting married she had to move to live with her husband’s family...She was told to respect her parents-in-law, to do every household chores and work in the field for them. She could not divorce whether she liked it or not. She could not return to stay with her parents.”<sup>114</sup>

A non-Hmong source supports this: “The patrilineal clan system of the Hmong ties together social, political, economic and religious aspects of behaviour, and serves as a primary focus for their daily lives” (Lewis, P. 1998:124).

The Hmong language belongs to a branch of the Sino-Tibetan languages. “That Hmong still speak their unique language after 45 centuries of assimilation pressure is in itself a remarkable accomplishment” (Yang Dao cited in Lewis, J. 1992:291). Although the strong oral tradition among the groups are kept alive, a “Romanized Practical Alphabet” was developed around 1960, and in 1990 a non-literate villager created a series of characters “...by which the sounds of Hmong could be written” (Ibid.,p.293).

#### **4.3.1.2. Main Features of the Akha Culture**

Political domination, wars and migration have also been the conditions for the various Akha groups, and according to von Geusau the Akha ‘internal’ history in the form of the oral tradition and the ‘external’ history of the region seem to be in accordance with each other (von Geusau in Turton 2000:138). Despite times of exploitation and slavery “...they have been able

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<sup>112</sup> Mr. Jongcheng Saewa (74), Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam, Thailand (2000 p.23)

<sup>113</sup> There are several advantages in the use of story-telling. It is in line with indigenous peoples’s own tradition, it makes people –especially women – more confident, and the story-teller retains control of the process. According to Tuhiwai Smith several modes of research and projects with indigenous peoples - including story-telling- have become imperative in the struggles for survival of the people, languages and cultures as well as within the act of self-determination.

<sup>114</sup> Life story: Nang Bounmee (45), Ban Denkang, the Lao PDR (2000 p.1-2)

to produce their own spaces in the hills, including the establishment of villages, fields and other intrasocietal hierarchies, all of which rely on carrying out Akha ancestral practices” (Tooker 1996:327). Akha genealogy goes back 55-60 generations to “...an apical ancestor and common founder of all Akha”, and the “...desire for CONTINUITY [capital letters in the original] is a dominant theme among the Akha” and “They see themselves as a link in the great continuum of Akha history” (Lewis P. 1998:10). The following statements confirm the importance of continuity:

*“It is important to preserve our culture, because indigenous culture is the daily life of the hill tribes. And it has continued from the ancestors, and I have to follow them”<sup>115</sup>*

*“In 100 years you will still be able to distinguish the Akha people from others”<sup>116</sup>*

Anywhere in the Akha community one finds the value attributed to continuity. The last syllabus in the father’s name will constitute the first syllabus in the son’s name etc.:

*“The child’s name will be the same as the father’s. For example the father’s name is Gausau, his son will be Sauka, the grandson will be Kana and then...”<sup>117</sup>*

The importance associated with the reproduction of the Akha society is a reflection of the cosmic potency. The mundane spirit-owners: crops, people and livestock receive their potency “...from the supramundane world (or cosmos)” (Tooker 1996: 328). The village headman gets his protective force through the flow from these ancestral forces. If there is a clear centre/periphery pattern in the location of houses in the village, in the construction of agricultural fields as well as if the interpersonal hierarchies are “...properly aligned with that of cosmos, then the village will be prosperous” (Ibid.,p.328). The entrance to an Akha village is marked with a gateway, and once this line is passed one finds “...a haven where Akhas can live free from maleficent influence” (Goodman 1996:3). The cosmos inside the village signifies “...the realm of human beings” (Lewis P 1998: 224) whereas evil spirits inhabit the chaos outside.

Some Akha people have abandoned their traditional beliefs and converted to Christianity<sup>118</sup>. In many cases the conversion might not be so much due to religious conviction as the wish to shy

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<sup>115</sup> Mr. Along Bialah (37), Ban Mae Chan Tai, Thailand (2000 p.55)

<sup>116</sup> Mr. Cheetah Tiupah (44), Ban Mae Chan Tai, Thailand (2001 p.10)

<sup>117</sup> Mr. Sawa Jubia (78), Ban Mae Chan Tai, Thailand (2000 p.17)

away from the numerous ceremonies that have to be observed in order to maintain cosmos by offerings and ceremonies. As von Geusau phrases it: “The Akha are poor and are not able to have chickens and pigs for the ceremonies anymore, and they look for an excuse to quit, and then Christianity becomes an excuse and not a choice, so we can accuse the missionaries”.<sup>119</sup> Thus conversion can be the pressure from the obligations inherent in the Akha way of life, as well as it also implies a certain Western presence in terms of missionaries, and some community members might assume that Christianity is the way to modernisation.

All aspects of social life in Akha villages are centred around the *Akhazang*, the culture and customary law, also referred to as The Akha Way. Several sources (e.g. Lewis P., Goodman) claim that this poem which consists of 10.000 lines of guidelines and rules was systematised about 30 generations ago<sup>120</sup>. The poem that has been cited in the original language during all the generations is another sign of “...the Akha continuum which must be maintained at all costs” (Lewis P. 1998:222). A part from the tribal history the *zang* dictates the proper way to perform ceremonies as well as correct Akha behaviour. An interviewee in one of researched villages is very articulate about this:

*“...we have to learn about the tradition and the ceremonies, because it empowers people, they have to learn as their parents before them, because when they grow up, they have to get married and continue the lineage, they should not ignore that”*<sup>121</sup>

The hierarchical, political structure of Akha society leaves the interpretation of the *zang* to the three most important offices in an Akha village, the village leader (*dzoema*), the teacher/reciter (*phima*), and ranking third in the village is the blacksmith (*badzji*), because of his task to forge the sacrificial spear and knife (von Geusau in Turton 2000:131, Goodman 1996:7-8). Only men are elected for these three functions.

As most indigenous populations the patrilineal concept is the rule. An interview confirms this:

*“The ceremonies are the men’s job, the lineage is male... Women’s responsibility are bigger, but only in one thing are men more important – the descent”*<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> There are no statistics to verify the scope of this conversion, but Goodman claims that up to a fourth of the total Akha population in Thailand have converted to Christianity (Goodman 1996:10).

<sup>119</sup> Interview, Chiang Mai, Thailand 12<sup>th</sup> December 2001.

<sup>120</sup> Assisted by Phima Assaw Mayeu, Dr. Inga Lill Hansson and Dr. Leo Alting von Geusau have translated a part of the Akha recitations (on the life-cycle of people, animals and plants) from archaic Akha language into Thai and English. The first draft was published in November 2000) (Hansson, von Geusau & Jupao 2000)

<sup>121</sup> Mr. Lhoyoum Mayao (36), Headman in Ban Mae Chan Tai, Thailand (2000 p.4)

<sup>122</sup> Mr. Ana Tiupah (54), Ban Mae Chan Tai, Thailand (2000 p.10)

In Akha society the bride “...is considered part of her husband’s lineage” (Goodman 1996:61), and in the case of divorce the children belong to the father, especially in case of male children. The same interviewee frames it as follows:

*“Women have to get married, and they are regarded as “second” persons, because they have no right to descend the family”<sup>123</sup>*

Thus the lineage and the patrilineal system together with the observation of the *Akhazang* form the pillars in the Akha culture.

The Akha language falls within one of the dialects of the Tibeto-Burman family (Lewis P. 1998:204), and for generations the Akha myths and traditions have been passed on orally. Lewis who lived in Burma for years has “...devised a modified Roman script for Akha” (Goodman 1996:99), and despite drawbacks (especially in the phonetic transcriptions), his work constitute a necessary base for further work (Ibid.,p.99).

The Romanised transcripts of the Hmong and Akha languages have made it possible for outside researchers to have a more nuanced knowledge of the respective cultures. The short description of the Hmong and Akha characteristics and values above does by no means pretend to be an anthropological analysis. The cited sources have, however, substantiated that regardless of various differences there are essential common features within the two groups in terms of perceptible powers from a supramundane world, the importance of lineage and clans, the patrilineal and hierarchical structures and not least the penal code and customary law as all-embracing guidelines in their societies’ political and practical life. Compared with the discourse on ethnicity in chapter 3 both the Hmong and the Akha groups must be said to fall in the category of ‘indigenous populations’.

#### **4.3.2. Selection Criteria and Local Assistance**

The rationale for choosing the Hmong and Akha was that both groups are represented in the Lao PDR and in Thailand, as well as the two groups can represent differences between indigenous groups. The insight in their cultures obtained through more than 3 years’ working experience among ethnic minority groups especially in the Lao PDR was an important criterion

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<sup>123</sup> See footnote 121.

for choosing the specific groups for this exploratory study. Finally the two groups are among the most comprehensively described in Western languages on which the researcher has to rely.

The selection criteria for choosing especially the 4 villages in question were jointly decided upon by mediators in the two countries and the outside researcher. For his particular research the different levels of criteria could briefly be illustrated as follows.

Level of selection criteria	
Ethnic groups	The selected Hmong and Akha communities can to a certain degree represent the ethnic minority groups in the two countries.
Community criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Physical accessibility and the assumption that the chosen communities do not differ significantly from other ethnic communities.</li><li>All 4 communities have experiences with both formal and non-formal education opportunities, and they are all target villages for various development projects.</li></ul> <p>In order to get a differentiated view of how education and human development are practised and perceived, the communities which also had contact with different kinds of educational programmes designed outside the community were selected.</p>
Interviewees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The interviewees represented a variety of age, gender, position and occupation.</li></ul>

Before proceeding with the research, however, the most important aspect was to obtain approval from the villagers themselves. The researcher sent letters (translated respectively into Lao and Thai, and the request was orally transmitted into Hmong and Akha languages) to the 4 villages through the different levels of official channels asking for permission to stay in the villages as well as asking about the community members' willingness to take time out to share their ideas with the outside researcher and her team<sup>124</sup> over a period of approximately 1 1/2 months in each village during autumn in 2000 and 2001.

Nearly in every villages there are some who have received formal schooling, but to acquire a full depiction of how education and human development can be perceived, another criterion for the research team was to choose villages which had non-formal education and life-skills programmes, instigated through specific development projects or by the Ministries of Education in the two countries. In Thailand the selected villages had a Community Learning

Centre (CLC) which functions as the village resource pivot. In the Lao PDR such centres are not yet fully developed.

The mediator in the Lao PDR had to belong to Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)<sup>125</sup>. The National Project Director in Long District, Louang Nam Tha Province approved the research study and the NCA Project Office in Long acted as base for the rural sociologist from NCA and me. The Lao sociologist, who holds the position of National Programme Coordinator for NCA, is a former colleague who holds two Master degrees from Europe and the United States respectively. Based on our past collegial relationship she readily understood the purpose of the study. In the Akha village a former community development worker (Akha herself) facilitated the discussions with the villagers. Thus the direct communication between the outside researcher and the two former colleagues in the research villages was a great advantage in building the trust of the villagers towards the inquirers. As for the Hmong village a health worker with previous experience from assignments for foreign agencies assisted in most discussions except for few interviews that were carried out by a National Programme Officer from NCA.

In Thailand the Centre for Non-Formal Education in Chiang Rai Province placed the Acting Director/Head of the Educational Promotion Sector at the disposal for the research<sup>126</sup>. During my work as education adviser in the Lao PDR he had arranged several study trips for my Lao colleagues and myself for us to learn about education among the ethnic groups in Thailand. It was a great advantage to have him as a mediator for the study. The two Service Centres for Non-formal Education in the respective districts appointed 2 staff members as translators to accompany the outside researcher during the stay in the villages. The teacher at the Community

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<sup>124</sup> The research team consisted of: mediators, translators, village facilitators, the Community Learning Centre teachers (in Thailand) and myself. See diagram at page 131. See also Appendix 2: Persons involved in the Research Process

<sup>125</sup> Presumably because the Hmong are still a controversial issue in the country it was not possible to obtain a researcher clearance from the Lao Government. The access into the country was therefore to spend one month as official development consultant, and then proceed to the actual research. Thus a review mission on education was carried out for Norwegian Church Aid (and UNDCP) in minority villages in the same area, and thereby it could be a good angle of incidence to the proper research. In Appendix 3: Phases in the Field Research, this review is referred to as Field Study "0".

Norwegian Church Aid was one of the first foreign aid agencies that were allowed to work in the Lao PDR (post 1975). For approximately 20 years the organisation has worked especially among the marginalised groups with integrated rural development (i.e. agriculture, community development, non-formal education, health and income-generating activities (with special focus on women). NCA has also co-operated with the United Nation's Drugs Control Programme in connection with i.e. endeavours to substitute opium with other marketable products.

<sup>126</sup> Thanks to the Acting Director, Achan Damri Janapiraganit, I obtained an official researcher clearance from the Ministry of Education, Bangkok 6. October 2000. (The document is available on request)



Learning Centre chose 2 village facilitators from the respective villages who arranged the meetings with the villagers.

It is, however, not unproblematic to work through a double set of translators. In this particular case the outside researcher's lack of ability to speak Thai as well as proper Lao combined with a similar lack of language proficiency in a Western language among the staff appointed to the research by the district education staff (in Thailand) will always leave room for misunderstandings, but eventual miscomprehensions were limited by the discussions between the two mediators and the translators (during weekends at the NCA project site in Mouong Long (Lao PDR) and in Chiang Rai town (Thailand)), which made the outside researcher confident about the reliability of the translations from both the translators and the local facilitators.

The problem that might arise, in general, with local facilitators is more of a conceptual than a linguistic nature. The village facilitators had had contact with the Lao and Thai societies in different ways, and thus they might mentally have left their culture and therefore they might be inclined to interpret the statements from the interviewees according to personal points of view. However, this is not considered to have caused a serious hindrance for this particular study, since the main objective was to gain insight into indigenous knowledge, an area that everybody in the village hold as the means to survival.

Another uncertainty that has to be taken into account is that the outside researcher might not have taken the necessary time, or used the right procedure to explain the objectives of the research study to the rest of the research team. Again the yearlong relationship with the two mediators and their meticulous supervision made me confident that the tasks of the translators and facilitators in the research were properly understood.

All translators, already known in the villages, as well as the facilitators were respected for their personal integrity and commitment, and there is no doubt that this has contributed to accept an outsider, and our invitation to various village ceremonies could be considered as a sign of this acceptance.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> In Ban Denkang (Hmong) in the Lao PDR my Lao colleague and I were even allowed to be present at a shamanistic séance, and in Ban Mae Chan Tai (Akha) in Thailand the team was invited to join in the ceremony of blessing the first rice harvest.

The table below sums up the various functions of the research team members:

Team members	Functions	
	In the Lao PDR	In Thailand
Mediators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtaining accept from National Project Director</li> <li>• Arranging contact with the selected communities</li> <li>• Arranging transport and accommodation in villages</li> <li>• Translating in villages to village facilitators</li> <li>• Supervising translators</li> <li>• Translating from Lao to English</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtaining researcher clearance for outside researcher from the Ministry of Education</li> <li>• Arranging contact with the selected communities through district authorities</li> <li>• Arranging transport to villages</li> <li>• Supervising translators</li> </ul>
Translators		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translating from English to Thai for village facilitators during interviews with villagers</li> <li>• Translating (from Thai to English) together with village facilitators during weekends in Chiang Rai town.</li> </ul>
Village facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Together with mediator planning time and place for interviews with villagers.</li> <li>• Being in charge of interviews with villagers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Together with the CLC teacher planning time and place for interviews with villagers</li> <li>• Being in charge of interviews with villagers.</li> </ul>
Community Learning Centre teacher		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing accommodation for translators and outside researcher</li> <li>• Assisting in interviews with villagers.</li> </ul>

### 4.3.3. Sample Groups

Before delving into the selected communities short village profiles are deemed useful. In the Lao PDR the 2 selected villages are situated in Long District, Louang NamTha Province where the Hmong and the Akha groups constitute the third and second largest groups. The Hmong village of Ban Denkang as well as the Akha village of Ban Houaytoumay were chosen because they were already target villages for Norwegian Church Aid<sup>128</sup> (Map 9).

In Thailand the Hmong village is situated in Mae Pha Luang District, and the Akha village in Mae Sruai District, both in Ching Rai Province, the Northernmost province bordering the Lao PDR and Myanmar (Map 9 & 10).

<sup>128</sup> The Lao regime does not allow independent researchers to go to villages which are not closely followed by government officials, so for security reasons for my Lao colleague and me it would not have been wise to choose other villages.

#### 4.3.3.1. Ban Denkang (Hmong), the Lao PDR

Ban Denkang is a resettled village situated along the National Road No. 17 at about 23 km from the district town. The official reason for resettlement was the large area suitable for paddy rice growing. There are 57 households with a total population of 349 of which 189 are women. All members believe in the power of spirits that influence every part of their lives.

A village headman responsible for the overall supervision of the village, and a deputy headman in charge of the village's economic matters comprise the organisational structure of the village. In addition there are representatives of mass organisations such as the Lao Front, Youth Organisations and Lao Women's Union. There are village soldiers and police. Furthermore a local person is selected to survey the agricultural activities.

Half of the population partially subsists on paddy rice cultivation and the other half on upland rice cultivation. There are 4 rivers near the village, so there are ample possibilities for irrigation schemes, but despite of the potentials to develop more paddy land the villagers have no capital to develop it. In the past the main income sources came from selling poultry and pigs, but communicable diseases have nearly put an end to this trade. Some villagers have smaller incomes through the sale of palm nuts, cardamom and rattan, as well as some families have sufficient rice and corn to sell. 7 households grow opium that is mainly consumed in the village.

The two leaders as well as the members of mass organisations have completed primary and secondary school. 129 persons can speak Lao of which the 93 can also read and write Lao. The language proficiency is illustrated below:

	Read, write and speak Lao	Understand and speak Lao	Understand and speak only Hmong
No. of persons	93	129	127

Source: Teacher in Ban Denkang, 2000

In 1995 a school was constructed in the village, a teacher was appointed by the district authorities, and in 2001 57 (16 %) of the children in the village are attending formal education. (Norwegian Church Aid 2001: Mouong Long, Village Profiles 2000-2001 p.6-7)

One man in the village has completed the basic level of medical school, but because of the low salary for government staff he has been forced to stay in the village to look after his family. He treats sick persons according to his ability. There are also a couple of healers in the village who assist in curing the most common diseases: malaria, diarrhoea and typhoid.

#### **4.3.3.2. Ban Houaytoumay (Akha), the Lao PDR**

The village of Houaytoumay is located about 1.100 meters above sea level, and at approximately 13 km from the district town. The village was established in 1979 (by villagers from Ban Houaytou). There are 43 households with a total population of 263 persons of which 131 are women. As in the Hmong village all community members share the belief in ancestral spirits.

Three men comprise the village leadership, and like in Ban Denkang other persons (representatives of Lao Front, Youth Organisation, Lao Women's Union, a person responsible for the security) are supposed to support and also to control the leadership. In Ban Houaytoumay, 4 persons are selected to fulfil each their responsibilities within agriculture, education, health and drug prevention. These 4 are under the supervision of the 3 village leaders.

The villagers substantiate their living from shifting cultivation, farming, collection of forest products, vegetable growing and animal-raising. Almost 1.000 hectares can be cleared for rice production and 4 hectares for raising animals. In years with normal rainfall Ban Houaytoumay has sufficient rice for consumption, and forest products like palm-nuts, cardamom and grass for broom-making constitute a welcomed supplementary income for many families. The two small rivers flowing near the village could serve a double purpose in terms of irrigation schemes for land to be cleared for rice growing as well as the natural fall could provide the village with a clean water system. Opium production has decreased the last years due to crop-substitution development projects (implemented with assistance from foreign aid and district authorities) as well as to law enforcement.

As nearly all villagers the village headman is not literate in Lao language. 92 persons (among those the 2 deputies) can understand and speak Lao and 64 can read and write Lao. The language proficiency is illustrated below:

	Read, write and speak Lao	Understand and speak Lao	Understand and speak only Akha
No. of persons	64	92	107

Source; Norwegian Church Aid 2001: Mouong Long, Village Profiles 2000-2001, p.5

Norwegian Church Aid assisted by the Long District authorities constructed a school in the village in 1997 as well as a Non-formal Education (NFE) programme was launched.

The village has no dispensary but the first deputy headman is a health volunteer, trained in basic health care, and he is consulted for the treatment of the typical diseases: malaria, diarrhoea and typhoid. Since 1997 there has been a revolving medicine fund<sup>129</sup>.

#### 4.3.3.3. Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam, Thailand.

Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam is located in the mountains very close to Myanmar (the Border Patrol Police controls the village and vicinity) and 73 km from the district town. There are 59 households with a total population of 432 persons. The majority of the population (106) is between 25-50 years, including the few Akha families in the village. Most villagers are spirit-believers, and a few profess to Buddhism (there is a small temple in the village).

Most households grow upland rice, and a few are paddy rice farmers. 16 families don't grow rice. The village is quite well off, they grow enough rice to sell (as well as corn and ginger), and nearly all households grow vegetables and keep animals (poultry, pigs and ducks). There are no malnourished children, and the most common illnesses are malaria and skin diseases. Many houses have electricity and there is a stable water supply. The language proficiency is illustrated in the table below:

	Read, write and speak Thai	Understand and speak Thai	Understand and speak only Hmong
No. of persons	131	190	111

Source: Nattawat Garneeb, CLC teacher in Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam, 2000

A primary school is located 3 km from the village, but in 1996 the Centre for Non-Formal Education in Chiang Rai established the Community Learning Centre (CLC) as one of 123 centres in the whole province. The teacher who is also trained in basic health care is in charge of the CLC and functions as the village development consultant, and together with the village

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<sup>129</sup> A revolving fund is a fund of medicines (generally provided from outside) to be disbursed among the most in need. The funds are repaid in cash or in kind.

leadership he is responsible for the different projects in the village. In Ban Hmong Hua Mae there are so-called quality of life projects such as: Iodine deficiency prevention, duck-raising, and birth control projects (for men).

#### 4.3.3.4. Ban Mae Chan Tai (Akha), Thailand

Ban Mae Chan Tai is situated in the mountains 55 km from the district town in Mae Sruai District. 33 households with a total population of 183 persons comprise the village that is entirely Akha, and all are animists. Some of the villagers used to live in Myanmar, but fled from the *corvée* under the military regime. Only 19 villagers are more than 50 years of age, and the majority is between 6 and 25. All villagers believe in the ancestral and spirit world.

All 33 households in Ban Mae Chan Tai grow upland rice and vegetables for own consumption. Ginger is the only product that the villagers grow for sale. The animals (pigs, poultry) are kept for own consumption as well, and the few horses in the village are means of transportation of goods from the valley. None of the houses have electricity, but a solar cell has recently been constructed, and many houses have tap water from the mountain sources. The language proficiency is illustrated below:

	Read, write and speak Thai	Understand and speak Thai	Understand and speak only Akha
No. of persons	77	37	71

Source: Jarin Wannarug, CLC teacher, Ban Mae Chan Tai, 2000

The nearest primary school is 4 km away in the valley, but the CLC offers the same kind of learning activities as the other Community Learning Centres in the province. In Ban Mae Chan Tai there is a school lunch project (the women in the village make lunch for the children at the CLC in turns). Furthermore there are iodine deficiency prevention and fruit growing projects.

The language proficiency in the national languages, Lao and Thai respectively, in the selected communities is higher in Thailand as well as it is higher in the Hmong communities than in the 2 Akha villages.

In sum, the similarities between the 4 mountain villages are more striking than the differences with regards to geographical and socio-economic marginalisation. They all have a strong leadership, and some indigenous communities in the two countries are so remote that they can

retain almost complete internal authority, provided that their decisions do not conflict with the national authorities. Most villages, however, could best be characterised as semi-autonomous. The homogenisation tendencies in both the Lao PDR and Thailand seek to impose the standards and values of the ruling majorities upon the indigenous communities. As examples it will suffice to mention the imposition of national curriculum in the village schools and the efforts to sell Western medicines to replace herbal medicines, as well as indigenous customary laws are superseded by external penal codes.

Given the similarities and differences among the ethnic groups and communities discussed above, and the consequent limitations that might have been exposed, the field research methods focus on interviews and life stories.

#### **4.3.4. Data Collection Methods**

The field study connected to this research was spread over approximately 1 ½ year starting with the preparatory phase in Denmark; planning with mediators, selection of villages, identification of facilitators, introductory letters to villages and translation of research topics etc. The following 5 phases were spent in the Lao PDR and Thailand. The phases had each their objectives, scope and methodologies and outcomes. The objective of *Field Study 1 (2000)* was to acquire a basic pool of data on the indigenous learning practices as well as examples from everyday life. During an interim phase where the first 59 interviews in Thailand and 25 in the Lao PDR were analysed, 8-10 key informants in each village were identified for *Field Study 2 (2001)* where the objective was to learn about the indigenous concepts of education and human development. Development practitioners with working experience with Hmong and Akha groups carried out *Field Study 3* which consisted of a kind of triangulation collected on the same topics in non-researched villages in Thailand. *Field Study 4* was a Round Table meeting in Thailand on long term perspectives for indigenous cultures with representatives from Akha, Karen and Yao cultures of which some had received formal education. The final component, *Field Study 5*, comprised interviews with different kind of local and foreign resource persons (academic and non-academic) who had long experience in working with indigenous populations in the region in order to get a differentiated view of the adaptation of these minority groups into modern society.<sup>130</sup>

The data collection methods<sup>131</sup> used in the villages was the same in all villages. In the Lao PDR the team stayed in private houses, and in the Thai villages in the Community Learning Centre, and the meetings with the villagers followed the same pattern in the two countries. After the reception at the headman's house the team spent the 5 days and evenings of the week interviewing people in their homes. It was a clear wish from the outside researcher that as many families as possible be interviewed, and that the team was as conspicuous in the village as possible i.e. by going to the fields with people, in Thailand being present every morning when the flag was hoisted etc.

After initial talks with the interviewees the village facilitator taped the answers and stories told by the men, women and young people. Every Friday night the research team returned to the NCA Project Office in Long District in the Lao PDR and in Thailand to a Hotel in Chiang Rai town. During the weekend the village facilitators listened to the tapes, translated the stories orally into Lao and Thai. The translators translated the stories into English, and finally the outside researcher computerised the answers and stories. On Mondays the team went up to the villages again.

The field study in 2001 followed the same procedure in Thailand. In the Lao PDR the key interviewees were invited to the NCA Project Office in the district town in the valley. The purpose was a sign of hospitality as well as to make the people more confident with another environment.

The "triangulated" interviews were translated into English by the interviewers themselves<sup>132</sup>. A Lao government official, whom I had known for years, translated the Round Table conversation in Thailand from Thai into English.

The outside researcher conducted structured interviews in English, directly or by written questionnaires with the resource persons, including directors, from the Department of Non-formal-Education in Chiang Rai and three Thai development organisations working with

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<sup>130</sup> In total, 94 interviews were carried out in the researched villages and 22 in non-researched villages. For an extensive description of the Phases in the Field Study see Appendix. 3.

<sup>131</sup> Defined as "A set of procedures and techniques for gathering and analyzing data" (Strauss & Corbin 1998:3)

<sup>132</sup> Ms. Seewigaa Kittiyounkhun translated from Hmong to Thai and Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku from Akha to Thai. Mr. Jorri Odochao translated from Karen to Thai.



indigenous groups<sup>133</sup>. Furthermore the essence of evaluation reports from a bilateral development project in Thailand will be scrutinised.

In the Lao PDR the data interpretation will build on interviews with national staff and expatriate staff from the Ministry of Education, as well an employee from a bilateral education project. Interviews with staff members from foreign development organisations can be biased and reflect project justification and strategies. Therefore I have deemed independent needs assessment and evaluation reports more appropriate to give a nuanced representation.

#### 4.3.4.1. Data Interpretation

The data were collected among 4 groups of interviewees:

Group 1: members of the 4 Hmong and Akha communities concerning indigenous education practices centred around three main topics:

- a) Areas of learning (“what did you learn”),
- b) Sources of learning (“from whom did you learn”),
- c) Means of learning (“how did you learn”)<sup>134</sup>

Group 2: villagers and indigenous thinkers’ concerning their concepts of education and human development

Group 3: staff and reports from 2 international NGOs in the Lao PDR<sup>135</sup>, one bilateral and 3 local NGOs in Thailand concerning their philosophy of education for hill tribes

Group 4: national and expatriate staff at the Ministry of Education in the Lao PDR, and the Department of Non-formal Education (MoE) in Thailand concerning their education philosophy

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<sup>133</sup> The interview with the Hill Areas Development Foundation was carried out by Achan Damri Janapiraganit

<sup>134</sup> Matrices used for systematisation of the collected data see Appendix 4

<sup>135</sup> The Lao Government does not allow local NGOs

For Group 1 the interpretation addresses the following questions:

- Do the data collected among the Hmong and Akha groups substantiate that indigenous learning practices are valuable in a changing world?
- What does it mean to their lives that the indigenous epistemology differ from the Western(ised)?
- How does the formal education curriculum affect their perception of the state
- How are the various non-formal education models received among the indigenous groups.

For Group 2 the interpretation addresses the following questions:

- In which way does the indigenous education and human development paradigms and visions compare with the Western(ised) paradigms, and how does it affect the self-understanding of the indigenous peoples?
- How do the indigenous peoples envisage their educational future (adaptation/assimilation/isolation)?

For Group 3 the interpretation addresses the following questions:

- What is the real philosophy and practice behind the different organisations' perception of education and the models planned and implemented with/for the indigenous peoples?

For Group 4 the interpretation addresses the following questions:

- Are there any major differences in the Lao and Thai governments' education policies for ethnic minorities, and does that show in the data collected in the two countries?
- What is the relation between the constitutional rights for ethnic minority groups and the actual education policies?

The communication of the indigenous educational practices and concepts is left to the Hmong and Ahka communities' own narratives and answers without any intervention from the outside researcher.

## CHAPTER 5: EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN HMONG AND AKHA COMMUNITIES IN THE LAO PDR AND THAILAND

The initial remark of the headman in Ban Houaytoumay, Lao PDR, Sohtou's: "*Have you come to ask me, normally people come and tell us what to do*" epitomizes unmistakably how most indigenous peoples perceive how non-indigenous peoples look upon the indigenous way of life. It reflects an unveiled assimilationist pressure from the majority culture as well as it is a denigration of indigenous epistemology. An example from a non-researched Hmong village in Thailand supports this: "*The education which is learned from schools is better. To have knowledge which is gained from the villagers only, people will look down on them, and call them primitive groups*"<sup>136</sup>. The accounts demonstrate great ignorance of the fact that education is an integral, valuable and inseparable part of indigenous peoples's daily lives, which has helped them to survive for centuries. Rovillos expresses the all-encompassing nature of indigenous learning practices very clearly by stating: "C'est grâce à ceux-ci que les enfants apprenaient les techniques de défense et de survie, les mœurs et les normes sociales, ainsi que leur histoire et leur culture (mythes, chants, danses, légendes etc." (Rovillos 2000:159).

The first part of the chapter is devoted to the Hmong and Akha groups' own description of the practical vertical and horizontal learning processes in time and space. The concept of human development that confirms a clash with Western understanding is likewise defined according to community interviewees and indigenous thinkers. A discussion of whether the indigenous practices and concepts have become obsolete in a modernising world concludes this part.

The second part gives examples of how centrally planned formal education programmes are perceived by representatives from indigenous groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand. The last paragraph of this part is a short discussion of the discrepancy between the acknowledgement of cultural diversity and majority-dominated education programmes.

The last part of the chapter looks critically upon some alternative education models for indigenous peoples. Examples of how mainly international organisations over the years have

tried to comply with the needs of marginalised people by means of non-formal education, community-based development and life-skills projects constitute a part of the chapter. Consequently this part investigates whether states can learn from Western aid education philosophy and practice.

### **5.1. Hmong and Akha Educational Practices and Concepts**

The quest for precision and strict boundaries in the definition of “education”, “knowledge” and “learning” is a Western demand. Interviewees in a non-researched Akha village pinpoint the irrelevance in conceptual boundaries when asked: “What is the difference between “indigenous education”<sup>137</sup> and “indigenous knowledge”? The interviewer transcribed the answers as follows:

“The relationship between community forms of education and the cultural heritage that forms the community body of knowledge is almost indivisible. It is possible to say that the body of knowledge, the cultural heritage of the Akha, is brought into and transmitted through the community systems of teaching by division according to the experts in the various areas. From cultural heritage, the knowledge is brought to life by the systems of community teaching”<sup>138</sup>

Von Geusau supports this explanation: “... education in Akha culture consists in transferring acquired knowledge from one generation to the other”<sup>139</sup>. Thus the act of transferring constitutes the learning process.

This is in keeping with Battiste & Henderson who claim that a linguistic and thereby conceptual clash between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures represents the biggest obstacle when outside researchers try to unravel the processes of indigenous knowledge. The Western(ised) methodologies are based on noun-centred language systems that “...are ineffective in verb-centred Indigenous language systems” (Battiste & Henderson 2000:40). The process of “learning” [kawm] and “teaching” [qhia] in Hmong language as well as the process of “learning” [yor] or [tror], and “teaching” [mae] in Akha<sup>140</sup> are closely linked to practical

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<sup>136</sup> Ms. Chong Anantavilai, Buak Jan village, Pong Yang Subdistrict, Maerim District, Chiang Mai Province. The interview was carried out by Ms. Seewigaa Kittiyongkhun as supplementary data collection (2001 p.2). See Appendix 3

<sup>137</sup> Some of the interviewees had received formal schooling, and knew the Thai word for education.

<sup>138</sup> Life story: Mr. Acha Morboku, village headman, Houi Lai village, Chiang Mai Province. The data were collected by Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku, IMPECT Association (2001 p.3) See Appendix 3

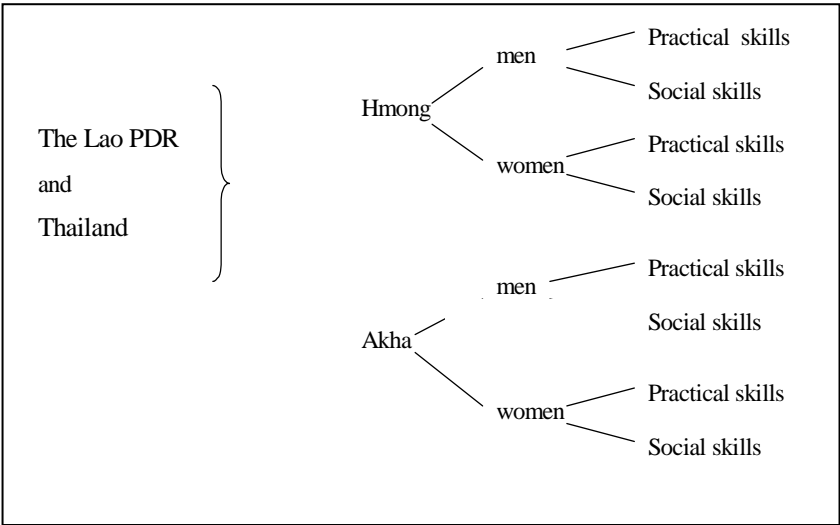
<sup>139</sup> Interview with von Geusau, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2001

<sup>140</sup> The concepts in Hmong are explained by Mr. Kongchy Yeayang and in Akha by Mr. Vanthong Petdouangsi—both in the Lao PDR. Mr. Kongchy is Hmong and holds a position as National Programme Officer for Norwegian

work in daily life and activities during ceremonies. The methods of acquiring knowledge, the thought processes as well as the reflections on empirically obtained knowledge in indigenous cultures are different from the more abstract out-of-context cognitive acquisition in non-indigenous cultures. The verb-intensive language of indigenous cultures stresses the action-related nature of the learning processes. The noun “education” does not exist in Akha language, but in Hmong it is equivalent to [Txuj ci] “bright knowledge”<sup>141</sup>.

5.1.1. Practical and Social Skills and Human Development

The interviewees’ own accounts of their gender-specific learning practices clearly demonstrate that acquiring knowledge in an indigenous culture is linked to verbs such as “to know, to do, to become” (Ocitti 1994:44). The following selection of interviews is derived from 219 pages of the



93 interviews in the researched villages supplemented by 22 interviews from non researched villages carried out in 2000 and 2001. Among the interviewees there were differences in the understanding of education and human development. Therefore the interpretation of the interviewees’ statements is divided in 4 groups (I-IV). The answers were taped, and the interviewees were given the time to explain their gender-specific learning within the different areas <sup>142</sup> (See footnote for the questions asked in the non-researched villages)<sup>143</sup>.

Church Aid, Lao PDR. Mr. Vanthong is Akha and act as Community Development Facilitator for Norwegian Church Aid., Lao PDR

<sup>141</sup> See footnote 139

<sup>142</sup> See the matrices in Appendix 4.

<sup>143</sup> 1.”In the West we understand education as the learning that takes place in a school with a fixed time-table and curriculum, but this might not be the only way to understand the concept. What is the villagers’ concept of education?

2. “Human Development “ is another concept that is used in the Western world – most often we use it to describe training courses and other activities that are planned for villagers. What do villagers understand by the concept? Do they have another concept?

3. “Empowerment” is a new concept in the West. Empowerment can be thought of as some way of giving power to somebody, give people authority, providing people with opportunities to improve their lives. Do you have something similar or another understanding of the concept? Please tell us what you find important here, and

Answers and statements from Group I:

**LAO PDR**

**HMONG<sup>144</sup>**

**Ban Denkang**

**Mens' stories:**

**a) – practical skills:**

- He learnt from his father to choose the firm soil mixed with clay and yellowish colour in order to have a good harvest.  
(Mr. Ka Tua Xong (67), 2000 p.4)
- *"It very much depends on myself, if I was not interested I would not learn. If you are interested you will find out how to learn from other people who have the knowledge and how to convince them to teach you. When I learnt to be a blacksmith at the beginning, I had to observe them first, and gradually started little by little, and we will have experience by doing"*  
(Mr. Ka Shoua Moua (62), blacksmith and shaman, 2000 p.25)
- *"We learn it [making baskets] from the parents. It means each generation of parents tell it to the next generation and so on"*  
(Mr. Yang Neng Yang (65), 2000 p.31)
- *"I have learnt from an old person that we should burn the field on the ninth day of the new month, because the wind will help it to be well burnt, and I have practiced this lesson since then"*  
(Mr. Wa Seng Lee (62), 2000 p.18)

**b) – social skills:**

- His parents told him not to do wrong things such as smoke opium and quarrel with friends, not to be drunk. Otherwise when his parents die he would not have a good life. After he married he had to teach the same things to his children like he learnt it from his parents. He has to behave better than when he was young such as not smoke opium, play late at night, visit the girls' houses.  
(Mr. Ly Heu (31), 2000 p.9)
- *"First of all we should be hardworking, polite and then able to distinguish between right and wrong things. That would make us attractive to the girls"*.  
(Mr. Xia Soua Lee (71), 2000 p.13)

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please give us some examples from your daily life in the village, and in relation to Thai society. (Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku 2001 p.1-5)

<sup>144</sup> The talks in Ban Denkang were mostly based on story telling rather than on regular interviews. The regular interviews are written in italics. The interviews in plain text are summaries of story telling. Mr. Kongchy conducted the interviews with men.

- A human being doesn't tell the lies. Doesn't socialize with dishonest people. Be honest and do good things. Look at and learn from the old people. The most important thing is: do not commit crimes.

(Mr. Wa Seng Lee (62), 2000 p.18)

- When he was a child his parents told him to be honest, to respect the parents, to learn good things, be clean and be friendly with other people. If he doesn't respect and obey his parents, he will be in trouble, and in addition he will also bring his parents into trouble with him, and they cannot rely on him when they become old. When he was young he learnt both from his parents and by himself that he must make friends everywhere he goes, because if one person says you are good, your value as a human being will be multiplied because people talk to each other, and they will know about your reputation. He has learnt to be nice to the young women and not to hurt them. After getting married he has learnt to be nice with the family of his wife, and create good understanding between the two families... If you are a good person, everybody will respect you and listen to you whether you are "educated" or not.

(Mr. Ka Tua Xong (67), 2000 p.4)

On leadership:

- *"In the past when I was the leader of my family and the village in Nam Bou, I have never let the cases [crimes] go to the court of the district. I made big problems to become the small ones".*

(Mr. Ka Shoua Moua (62), 2000 p.24)

#### Women's stories:

##### a) – practical skills:

- *"When I was young my parents told me to cook and work in the field. During off season I had to stay at home to do embroidery and make clothes...As a Hmong, if we didn't listen to our parents, we will be backwards, opium addicts, thieves and we will be lonely. We have to learn from other people, so we will not be looked down upon. Other people might look poor, but their thinking and their hearts are not poor. Those who work hard in the field are clever people"*

(Nang Ka (45), 2001 p.2)

- She started to embroider when she was 8 years old. She learnt it from her mother and other women in the village.

(Nang May (45), 2000 p.3)

##### b) – social skills:

- To be a good Hmong girl she must respect the old people, not show off, she must be diligent, must know embroidery and wake up early in the morning to do the household chores.

(Nang Bounmee (45) midwife, 2000 p.1)

- When she was young she had to talk nicely to other people, to be patient, to stay at home. The young men could come and talk with her at night and talk quietly on her bed.

(Nang May (45), 2000 p.3)

- Music is a part of the Hmong tradition...When they [young men] fall in love, they have to use music to communicate with the girls... Music can communicate with human beings and spirits.

(Nang Ka (45), 2001 p.2)

**Ban Houaytoumay**

**Men's stories:**

**a) – practical skills:**

- His father told him that the choice of field is very important for a good harvest. His father told him that he has to shift the rice field every year, and leave the forest to regenerate for 8-9 years before he goes back to growing rice there. He also learnt that he had to be prepared for rice shortage by raising pigs and chicken to exchange it for rice. Before his father passed away, he asked Songnah to learn how to make baskets for selling and for household use. He learnt how to make baskets from a man in the village.

(Mr. Songnah (50), 2000 p.7)

- His parents told him that they should protect the forest around their village. The forest can provide wood to build their house. Trees can protect their village from wind and storm. They can also make coffins from trees in the forest... Their elders have told their descendents not to cut down the forest trees at the upstream either for upland farming or wood for house building, because the rivers would be dried up.

(Mr. Sohtou (55), village headman, 2001 p.3)

- Before he became a blacksmith he was always sick, and his parents told him to be a blacksmith, and he would not be sick. Since then he has been a blacksmith. He has learnt to make the blacksmith equipment from Mr. Ato in Chakhamtanh village when he was young, and he still remembers it.

(Mr. Jongcheoh, (53) blacksmith, 2000 p.13)

- In case the rice does not flower or there are some diseases or pests, he reports to the district agriculture office to assist him

(Mr. Asa (44), 2000 p.4)

**b) – social skills:**

- The children must learn from their parents, otherwise they will become lazy, and they cannot find somebody to marry. Parents tell their girls that if they don't go and play with young men when they reach 13-14 years of age they will not grow up.

(Mr. Sohtou, (55), village headman, 2000 p.1)

- They must think of other people before they say something. They must reflect on what they say in order not to upset other people.

(Mr. Asa (44), 2000 p.6)

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<sup>145</sup> The talks in Ban Houaytoumay were more based on story telling than on regular interviews. Nang Nang and Mrs. Minavanh Pholsena conducted the regular interviews. Nang Nang is Akha and holds a position as Village Facilitator for Norwegian Church Aid in Long District. Mrs. Minavanh Pholsena is holds a position as National Programme Coordinator for Norwegian Church Aid



- When he was a child his parents told him to love his brother, and not to dispute with other people, not to take other people's things and not to tell lies.  
(Mr. Geusoh (50), 2000 p.9)
- When he was young his parents told him not to quarrel with other people, because he will be considered a bad person. When he teaches his children he has to show it to them, he must not be aggressive and must not beat them, otherwise the children will lose confidence in him, and they will not be open-minded with the parents, or they will act against them and not assist them. When the children become adults they can learn from other people in the village.  
(Mr. Amae (44), deputy headman, 2000 p.10)

**Women's stories:**

**a) – practical skills:**

- Her parents taught her to grow cotton, to weave and to make clothes. She has learnt how to make cotton thread when she was 7 years old, and how to weave when she was 11.  
(Nang Mapoh (78), 2000 p.20)
- When she was 20 years old she started dyeing her own clothes and for the members of the family. She has to grow indigo under the big trees in order to have shade. When the indigo plants have grown enough, she cuts it and puts it to soak in the water jar until the plants become rotten, and then she takes the plant out and puts lime in the indigo water. She learnt it from her mother.  
(Nang Jesoh (60), 2000 p.14)

**b) – social skills:**

- They [her parents] told her not to take things from other people, and that she had to be honest and to work hard.  
(Nang Mithi (50), nyipa<sup>146</sup>, 2000 p.12)
- She has taught her children not to quarrel with other people.  
(Nang Mapoh (78), 2000 p.20)
- When she was a child her parents told her not to quarrel with other people, to look after herself, to wash her clothes and to decorate her hair. She could not to play with young boys and not sleep with them, or she would have an infection. She had to respect the old people, and look after them. If she looked down at the old people she would not have a good life. If she has food she must offer it to the old people first. If she is married she has to look after her parents-in-law and respect them.  
(Nang Bjazeuh (37), 2000 p.23)

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<sup>146</sup> A nyipa is a woman specialised in herbal medicine.

**THAILAND**

**HMONG**

**Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam**

**Mens' stories:**

**a) – practical skills:**

- *"I learnt it [basketry] from my father, and I can make a beautiful basket just like him...I will teach my children to do it, because it is part of Hmong culture"*  
(Mr. Saeng Saewang (45), 2000 p.5)
- *"I learnt it [basketry] from my brother and father"*  
(Mr. Tjulaoh Saewang, Saeng's son (23), 2000 p.7)
- *"When I go to the forest without some food, I will find the fruits that the animals can eat: I will pass that knowledge on to my children too"*  
(Mr. Taeng Saewang (28), 2001 p.3)
- *"My parents taught me that I have to observe the insects, because if they can eat it, I can also. If we would like to know if we can eat it, we boiled it with paddy rice. If the plant turned yellow it was poisonous, and we would die"*  
(Mr. Faihau Saewang (47), 2001 p.10)
- *"From my parents I learnt about plantation, house construction, farming and all ceremonies... I can teach what I have learnt in the past to someone who wants to learn"*  
(Mr. Taeng Saewang (28), 2000 p.30)
- *"Since I was born my parents taught me, and I followed my parents' teaching...My responsibilities depended on my parents' teaching. If I didn't follow them directly I would be blamed, so I just did what they told me to do"*  
(Mr. Long Saelao (28), 2000 p.38)
- *"I consult the agricultural assistant or an experienced person to proceed new methods...I was growing fruits, then insects came close to the fruit plot. I didn't know how to get rid of them, so I asked the agriculture assistant"*  
(Mr. Ngao Saelao (26) 2000 p.47)
- *"In the past I followed my parents' suggestions. Now I get advice from the Agricultural department Centre (Hua Mae Kam) about plantation methods, soil quality improvement and new variety of seeds"*  
(Mr. Kachju Saelao (54), village headman, 2000 p.14)
- *"Yes [there is a song about forest preservation], but I only remember brief lyrics from the song saying that if the forest is destructed the wild animals will have no habitat, and the mountains will have no trees, and the animals will be crying"*  
(Mr. Faihau Saewang (47), 2000 p.47)

**b) – social skills: (men and women):**

- *“If they [a young couple] fell in love with each other and it would be agreed by the parents of the bride both bride and groom held the umbrella until they reached the house and sang a song, 1 song to their parents and they sang one song for opening the door. When they entered the house and one song for asking for water for washing their face and one song for calling the relatives.”*

(Wahleng Saelao (87), 2000 p.40)

[The purpose of four long myths told by the blacksmith]

- *“It is told to teach the Hmong that when we are alive we should not blame each other, because it brings unhappiness”.*
- *This myth is told to teach someone whose lover is dead to make him/her think of his/her lover.*
- *“It is told to teach people not to be lazy, and it is told to create fun in the group”.*
- *“It is told to teach the Hmong people to live together harmoniously and not to quarrel with anyone in their social life”.*

(Mr. Jongcheng Saengwa (74), blacksmith, 2000 p.21)

**Women’s answers:**

**a) – practical skills:**

- *“I learnt from my sister about embroidery, sewing and cooking... I learnt from my parents and the nature that surrounded me”*  
(Mrs. Ka Saewang (74), 2000 p.1,2)
- *“I learnt many things from my parents such as to cut the bottle gourd and use it as bowl, cut bamboo and use it as glass, and to make a spoon. After that I learnt how to cook, raise pigs, sew and do farming”*  
(Mrs. Mae Saewang (35), 2000 p.4)
- *“I observe the plots of my neighbours, and I ask the seeds from the neighbours who have good yield”*  
(Mrs. Naeng Saewang (39), 2000 p.9)
- *“My parents died when I was young, I learnt by looking at others and follow them”*  
(Mrs. Kia Saewang (52), 2000 p.33)
- *“I learnt about herbs once I went to the forest to fetch firewood, and I cut my finger. I took some grass and put it on my finger, but the blood didn’t stop. I tried another kind of grass, and then the blood stopped. So I decided to use this kind of grass, if I ever cut my finger again, and I have taught it to the children too”*  
(Miss. Posuah Saelee (18), village facilitator, 2001 p.11)

## AKHA

### Ban Mae Chan Tai:

#### Men's stories:

##### a) - practical skills:

- *"Everything is useful. If someone was not following the father's teaching he would have nothing to eat"*  
(Mr. Sawa Jubia (78), 2000 p.16)
- *"The Akha hill tribe people have to study indigenous learning, because we are far from the Thai society, so it is necessary for us. If we don't study the indigenous learning, we cannot sustain our lives"*  
(Mr. Soonthon Juepa (36), 2000 p.47)
- *"Men will learn from their fathers, such as: rice plantation and growing, building houses, making swing for the Akha swing ceremony, making areas for threshing rice, hunting equipment (string and bow), birds- and mice traps"*  
(Mr. Amae Tiumuh (65), 2000 p.1)
- *"The ancestors taught us: don't cut the whole of the banana trees near the water source, because if we do so, it will cause soil erosion if we take the root also. If you cut the whole tree, the water will be polluted, because the roots will wither, and the water will be yellow"*  
(Mr. Cheetah Tiupah (44), environmental preservationist, 2001 p.8)
- *I learnt it [environmental preservation] from the officers from the Department of Forestry and other government units, and I heard it on the radio. In the past we only preserved the forest in the area where we perform our ceremonies, because I was taught that the forest is the rain resource"*  
(Mr. Cheetah Tiupah (44), 2000 p.52)
- *"I learnt from experimenting and observation"*  
(Mr. A-Eu Yabiang (22), 2000 p.33)
- *"It is good to have to types of learning, because the indigenous will be good on religious things, for the traditional culture which include supporting life. The formal schooling is good, because we can learn from non-tribal people, also about the legal actions when we go down we are able to adapt to their society"*  
(Mr. Lhoyoum Mayao (36), village headman, 2001 p.6)

##### a) – social skills:

- *"Men also learn how to respect ghosts and ancestors"*  
(Mr. Amae Tiumuh (65), member of religious leadership, 2000 p. 1)
- *"Love song [can give me knowledge]: If there is no love between man and woman they cannot get married. If the get married rapidly they get children rapidly. A 15 old woman is ready for marriage, and an 18 years old man. This song gives knowledge on love and marriage".*  
(Mr. Amae Tiumuh (65), 2001 p.2)

- *“When I was 15 or 16 they [my parents] taught me how to make love to a woman, to be a householder and about marriage”*  
(Mr. Laiju Juipa (63), 2000 p.12)
- *“I would like them [the younger generation] to use some of the indigenous learning and mix it with modern life”*  
(Mr. Amae Tiumuh (65), 2000 p.1)

On leadership:

- *“It [power] can be obtained because the leader is near us, and as we live in the same community we can also observe his behaviour and notice his work, and therefore he is reliable”*  
( Mr. Soonthon Juepha (36), 2000 p.47)
- *“...When there is a development activity, the village leader has to be involved in the activity to be a good example for the villagers”*  
(Mr. Cheetah Tiupah (44), 2000 p.52)

**Women’s answers:**

**a) – practical skills:**

- *I practiced weaving, dyeing, rice pounding, cotton spinning, because it was women’s work. If I don’t know these things, I cannot support my life. I had to practice since I lived with my parents, because when I got married and didn’t have this knowledge, the parents of the groom would insult my parents that they didn’t teach me”*  
(Mrs. Meecher Mohpoh (78), 2000 p.14)
- *“For the one who had never learnt from the parents he will starve and have nothing to wear, and the one who never obeyed his parents will be the same as the one who learnt nothing”*  
(Mrs. Apai Juepa (62), 2000 p.21)
- *“Our learning is plantation, rice and corn growing, rice boiling and embroidery”*  
(Mrs. Dele Garvo (17), 2000 p.6)
- *Songs in the Swing ceremony<sup>147</sup>, and the meaning is: When the cicada sings it is time to grow rice. When the rice has ears and it is time to harvest the cicada we will go to the forest. If there are many cicada somewhere, it means that this place will give more yields. When the birds sing, it is time to prepare the land for growing*  
( Mrs. Ziuyah Tiumuh (61), 2001 p.4)

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<sup>147</sup> The Akha Swing is a huge swing overlooking the whole village. A new swing is erected each year on the site of the old one. The annual swing ceremony is one of the most important among the many Akha ceremonies. During the annual ceremony the ancestors are worshipped, village leaders are honoured, the young people court and the ceremony will, if properly carried out, guarantee a prosperous year for the village (Lewis P. 1998 p.203-218).

- [The games I played was] *“I used tree leaves as embroidery cloth. I also used tree leaves to sew a hat. Dried bamboo shoots were used for making a”tray” in order to learn how to beat the rice”.*  
(Mrs. Apae (57), 2001 p.4)
- *“There is a song about going to the field. In the song there is an insect similar to the cricket that sings to people. It sings about when it is time to go back home”*  
(Mrs. Apae (57), 2001 p.4)

**b) – practical skills:**

- *“Parents’ teaching is about planting and housework and to be diligent and have good manners...If I have a girl I will teach her to be a mother and to train her to be polite and obey her parents”*  
(Mrs. Dele Garvo (17), 2000 p.6-7)
- *“When I grew older, my parents would not allow me to go outside without their permission. They taught me not to get involved with a young man, but to stay at home, not to go out unless it was necessary. They taught me to work and be diligent, and when it was appropriate they would tell me to get married. They taught me to be good”*  
(Miss Buhnong Tiupah (17), leader of youth club, 2000 p.11)

On leadership:

- *“I observe his [the village leader] doing and how he administers all members in his family. Has he ever quarrelled with others? The most important thing is that the villagers followed him since he was young, so the elders in the village can choose a good person to look after the village”*  
(Mrs. Milong Tiupah (40), 2000 p.61)

The process of acquisition of knowledge, skills, behaviour which come to the fore from these statements by interviewees of the communities reveals a simplistic and traditionalist life-style and its reproduction. As such exploring the indigenous understanding of the practical learning processes might challenge the non-indigenous inquirer’s cemented ideas, but nevertheless: “No society is without education and no education is without its culture which it helps to support” (Ocitti 1994:36). Seeking to comprehend how indigenous peoples interpret the concept of human development is quite a different matter. It does not involve great difficulties to translate it literally into Hmong and Akha languages. However, the conceptualisation of human development both in the Western development discourse and as a part of various development strategies, has connotations attached to it that might be conceptually alien to indigenous peoples who have a different meaning to the terms “human” or at least to “development”. According to the Hmong, human development, [txhim kho tib neeg] means “improve the

human being”, and in Akha [tsor ha dor mae] means “teaching to be a human being”, or “teach the children to become human being”<sup>148 149</sup>

When interviewees in the four sample villages and the nine non-researched villages were encouraged to elaborate on their own understanding of human development, there appeared to be more than one way to interpret the term:

The answers below represent the collected data:

### ***LAO PDR***

#### **HMONG**

##### **Ban Denkang**

*“Human development is the learning process of the human being from being a child up to old age”*  
(Mr. Bi Moua (25) TPA representative, 2000 p.8)

*“Human development means that the behaviour and the practice of a person change according to the age”*  
(Nang Bounmee (45) 2001 p.4)

#### ***THAILAND***

##### **Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam**

*“Human development is learning, ability to use things in the daily life and self-development for better life supporting”*  
(Mr. Tjulaoh Saewang (23) 2000 p.7)

*“It is the action of watching other people doing good things and imitating them”*  
(Mr. Koh Saelao (21), Village facilitator 2001 p.13)

*“I have to work for good yields. If I have much rice and corn I will be happy. When I sell vegetables, I will have money to buy blankets, cloths and pots.”*  
(Mrs. Kia Saewang (52), 2000 p.33)

##### **Non-researched Hmong village Ban Buak Jan Village**<sup>150</sup>

*“Human development is to teach people to do good things. For example parents teach their children to be diligent, honest, kind to all, and have skills to farm and to trade for earnings”*  
(Mr. Tu Saewa)

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<sup>148</sup> The Hmong term is explained by Mr. Kongsy Yeayang and the Akha equivalent by Mr. Vanthong Petdouangsi

<sup>149</sup> Likewise in Karen language [do-htaw thaw htaw le k' ca da wae] means “to grow up by our own”, (explained by Mr. Prasert Trakansuphakon, former Director of the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture Association in Thailand (IMPECT))

<sup>150</sup> The data from Buak Jan village, Pong Yang Subdistrict, Maerim District, Chiang Mai Province The interviews were collected by Ms. Seewigaa Kittiyounghkun as supplementary data collection (2001p.2) (See Appendix 3, Field Study 3)

## AKHA

### Ban Mae Chan Tai

*“It is imitating from other people and then apply it to your own life”*

(Mr. Along Bialeh (37), 2001 p.6)

*“Human development is to assist and develop the people by learning from the learner, maybe the old man who has local wisdom, by studying the good points, and thereby the people will be developed”*

(Mr. Soonthon Juepha (36), 2000 p.46)

Non-researched Akha villages:

### Pa-Daeng Village<sup>151</sup>

*“The concept of ‘human development’ is explained as knowing how and when to exchange knowledge and, importantly, how to apply that knowledge in ones life. Specialized knowledge in any area is attained by one seeking out of teachers and asking how to be taught (‘human development’ within the community)”*

(Mr. Amue Pia-miaku)

### Ban Houi Kert,<sup>152</sup>

*“Human development or the development of humans is understood as the instruction of youth by elders. It is far more conceptual though, with no clear established curricula or specific areas of knowledge divided into subjects”*

(Mr. Lo-ue Morboku)

The above selection shows that: a) there is no difference in the way that the Hmong and the Akha perceive “human development”, b) the interviewees from the non-researched villages express the same understanding as the interviewees among the sample groups and c) the interpretation in the villages in the Lao PDR do not differ from the ones in the Thai villages<sup>153</sup>. The core characteristics of the interviewee defined the term human development as action-oriented activities, synonymous with a lifelong learning process; the learner gains knowledge by observing and imitating others, mainly older people; learning takes place in co-operation with other people.

Bearing Rovillos’ definition of indigenous education in mind the above accounts provide evidence that education and human development is a life-long process that prepares the individual for being a full member of her/his particular community. Ocitti agrees when he calls the learning a socialisation or enculturation process whose purpose is “...the humanization of

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<sup>151</sup> The data from Pa-Daeng village in Chiang Mai Province were collected by Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku, IMPECT (2001 p.4). See Appendix 3.

<sup>152</sup> The data from Ban Houi Kert were collected by Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku, IMPECT Association (2001, p.3). (see Appendix 3.

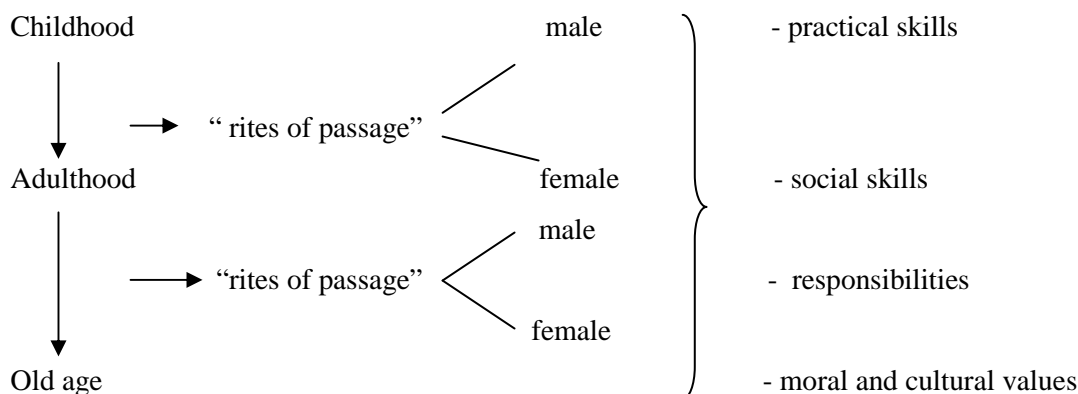
<sup>153</sup> Both the Hmong and the Akha interviewees in Thailand were more outspoken than those in the sample villages in the Lao PDR. In general, Thai villages are more used to foreign researchers, and despite the constant military presence in Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam the people seemed less reticent than the villagers in the Lao PDR where the strong political control is likely to curb people’s openness.



man in society” (Ocitti 1994:14) The “womb-to-tomb” learning encompasses both a vertical time - and a horizontal space cycle that is illustrated below. The skills explained by the villagers themselves are acquired according to readiness and not necessarily restricted to a certain age.<sup>154</sup> As the person grows older a new status is ascribed to her/him, and s/he has to learn other gender-specific skills of practical and behavioural nature.

Building on the interviews the diagrams below are my schematic outlines of the way villagers systematise their learning. (The rites of passage are put in inverted commas to illustrate that the Hmong and Akha are not physically injured as is the case in some other indigenous cultures).

### **The Vertical Time Cycle:**



Along with the chronological vertical learning, the accounts show that indigenous peoples also can be said to undergo an organised horizontal space learning process. Regardless of the person’s age, a parallel learning takes place within the family, the community as well as from other communities. (Ancestral lines refer to the knowledge of the clan history, and the community laws refer to the customary laws that constitute the moral codex that is specific for the particular community.)

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<sup>154</sup> “...parents explain and teach according to both the capability and the age of their children... responsibilities are given to the children according to what they are able to do. E.g. Responsibility for cutting bamboo shoots etc. are taught in the early teenage years”. Data collected in Ban Pa-Hee, Chiang Mai Province, by Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku (2001 p.1)

**The horizontal space learning process:**

▼	▼	▼
<u>Near/ extended family</u> - basic skills	<u>Community:</u> - community living	<u>Wider society:</u> - additional skills (e.g.trading)
- ancestral lines	- community laws	- exchange of experience and knowledge
	- ceremonies	

The interviews show that the education in the family for the child encompasses the practical work following the seasons, and later the consciousness of being part of a clan with privileges and duties is inculcated in the person. During ceremonies the elders make the children participate which “re-enforces the elders’ [people over 40] role in teaching as well as it promotes close contact between the young and the old in the communities” <sup>155</sup> Thus, teaching the children and the young people is a collective responsibility of the whole village. As stated in some of the interviews the horizontal learning process shows that the villagers also appreciate learning from the wider society.

Besides the learning by observing and imitating other people from within and outside the community, myths and songs (very often in connection with the ceremonies) constitute other means of learning. The gender-specific games children play all serve as preparation to their future roles in the community.

**5.1.1.1. Interpretation of Statements from Group I:**

Thus the “womb-to-tomb” learning<sup>156</sup> is essential for the maintenance of the community (spiritual coherence: the religious belief in and worship of ancestors, economic survival: deep relation with, and respect for, their environment and hence physical subsistence, the political climate: the patriarchal organisation and respected leadership, and finally moral integrity: social behaviour and internal harmony). The interviews also illustrate that the person who is “initiated” into her/his new status is taught by different members of the community in different subjects, which gives the members of the community educational roles throughout their lives.

<sup>155</sup> Data collected in Pa Daeng village, Chiang Mai Province by Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku (2001 p.2)  
<sup>156</sup> At the Round Table meeting 20.Dec. 2001 (See Appendix 3, Study 4), Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku phrased is as follows: “This was also a learning process that started from waking up to falling asleep, which means from birth to death” (p.1)

The interviews make it clear that education and human development in essence is a question of acquiring the competences that are in accordance with the nature of the particular social organisation.

Other interpretations from both young and old interviewees enhance the learning processes and reflect a broader and more philosophical point of view that is related to the above described acquisition of relevant competences. A small, significant selection of a different understanding of human development by interviewees is shown below:

**LAO PDR  
HMONG**

**Ban Denkang**

*“Human development is to learn how to be self-confident, to be self-reliant, not to rely on other people, because when the children grow up, they have to live their own lives”*

(Mr. Ly Heu (31), 2000 p.9)

**THAILAND  
HMONG**

**Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam**

*“The family leader has to observe the members in the family to help them develop themselves”*

(Mr. Taeng Saewang (28), 2000 p.29)

*“I have to develop my mind”*

(Mr. Nchaila Saewang (80), village shaman 2000 p. 55)

*“I think it is personal development and well-being development”*

(Mr. Wahlang Saelao (87), 2000 p.39)

*“Human development is the value and the quality of humans”*

(Mr. Sathra Saesong (23), 2000 p.41)

**AKHA**

**Ban Mae Chan Tai**

*“Human development is not necessary to learn from other people. We can think or do ourselves, and apply our capability to anything we can do”*

(Mr. Lhoyoum Mayao (36), Headman, 2001 p.7)

*“Human development means what we would like to learn,... and adapt it to our situation”*

(Boubah Lacherku (25), Village facilitator, 2000 p.38)

Apart from the acquisition of practical and social skills human development thus also implies the process of psychological maturing, consistent with the Hmong interpretation “to improve the human being” and the Akha “teaching to be a human being” that pertain to the physical and especially the mental health of the person as well as improvement of personal well-being. Unlike the first group of answers it is not clear whether this second group interprets human development primarily as an individual or intra-community development process without any influence from outside. The answers illustrate an appreciation of their own cultural values and competences as well as a desire to decide for themselves which advice from outside the community is deemed appropriate for their community.

The interrelation with the surrounding society and not least considerations concerning the future for their children gave way for the following answers on the necessity of the education that is organised by the respective governments. A few answers from some indigenous interviewees are shown below, Group II:

**LAO PDR**

**HMONG**

**Ban Denkang**

- Human development is to give education for the children in order for them to be able to work with the government.

(Nang Ka (45), 2000 p.6)

**AKHA**

**Ban Houaytoumay**

- The parents have to encourage the children to go to school. They can gain knowledge and cleverness from the school in order to become government officials.

(Mr. Amae (44) deputy headman, 2000 p.11)

**THAILAND**

**HMONG**

**Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam**

- “I learn Thai literacy from school, so that I can communicate with government officers, and from my parents I learn about daily life and Hmong traditions”

(Mr. Taeng Saewang (28), 2001 p.3)

- *“I would like my children to learn in school, because they will learn Thai, and they can communicate with the Thai society. And I need my children to preserve the traditions of the Hmong culture, and I will teach them how to earn their living according to the Hmong way, because it is not everything you can learn in school”*

(Mr. Saunouh Saewang (37) 2001 p.16)

## AKHA

### **Ban Mae Chan Tai**

- *“It is good that we have two types of learning, because the indigenous will be good on religious things, for the traditional culture which includes supporting life. The formal schooling is good, because we can learn from non-tribal people, also about the legal actions, when we go down [in the Thai society] we are able to adapt to their society”*

(Mr. Lohyoum Mayao (36), village headman, 2001 p.6)

- *“I have to learn about working to support my family, because I live in the mountain, there are no other ways to do... Now there are modern technologies that have come to the village, the teachers come to teach about education, the officers from the Department of Forestry have come to teach about forest preservation, and I have to sell the yields to the down- town people .So I have to learn modern education in order to communicate with them”*

(Mrs. Mizi Tiumeuh (34), 2000 p.59)

- *“It [modern education] is necessary because we have to communicate with Thai people all the time. We cannot live in a narrow society”*

(Ms. Pahnee Geuseuh (24), 2001 p.12)

#### **5.1.1.2. Interpretation of statements form Group II:**

The appreciation of their own educational practices and their relevance to life in the mountains is still the principal position, although the answers also show that they want to interact with the Lao and Thai societies. However, the statements can also be interpreted as some villagers’ recognition of formal education as inevitable for becoming a part of the general development process. Many of the answers from the Lao villages show that the expectation of becoming a government official by means of formal education is the only way to development, and that once the younger generation holds a government position, a prosperous future awaits them.

The expectations in the Thai villages are of a somewhat different nature. Here most mountain people don’t have Thai citizenship, and therefore learning the Thai language properly through formal education might be a means to enhance their chances to remedy this situation.

It could be assumed that the answers from the villagers reflect that the Lao and Thai governments or the larger societies have convinced the villagers that formal education is the only valuable way to development.

Some answers concerning “human development” from some indigenous interviewees could support this imposition of Western(ised) concepts, Group **III**:

## **LAO PDR**

### **HMONG**

#### **Ban Denkang**

- Human development is to give education for the children in order to be able to work with the government. After they have the project in the village their lives have improved, she is poor like before, her husband has been detoxified, there are people from the project coming to the village. She feels that there is somebody who cares about them, and they are not isolated as before.  
(Nang Ka (45), shaman, 2000 p. 69)

## **THAILAND**

### **HMONG**

#### **Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam**

- *“I assume it is government support and assistance in development”*  
(Mr. Faehau Saewang (47), 2000 p.44)
- *“In modern life it is an evolution of facilities”*  
(Mr. Koh Saelao (21), village facilitator, 2000 p.49)

## **AKHA**

#### **Ban Mae Chan Tai**

- *“In my opinion it is the treatment, hospitals and clinics, because in the past there were no hospitals, and we had to be cured by herbal medicines, but now there are many hospitals. I think this is one example of human development”*  
(Mr. A-eu Beche (26), 2000 p.32)
- *“Human development is learning about new things from downtown people”*  
(Mr. Cheetah Tiupah (44), 2000 p.53)
- *“It [human development] is education for the modern life”*  
(Mr. Ata Tiupah (26), 2000 p.29)
- *“In the past I had to work hard, but now there are more conveniences such as motorcycle, cars and insecticides”*  
(Mrs. Mizum Mohpoh (39), 2000 p.56)
- *“I think in the past I had to harvest the cogon grass to repair the roof every year, now I have changed it into tin, it made my life more comfortable”*  
(Mrs. Milong Tiupah (40), 2000 p.60)
- *“I think it is learning about new things and education”*  
(Mrs. Mizi Tiumeuh (34), 2000 p.59)

#### **5.1.1.3. Interpretation of Statements from Group III:**

The sample villages are all involved in government – and/or foreign supported development projects, and the above interpretations demonstrate how the concept of “human development” has widened among some villagers to comprise modern facilities. In this regard it is worth

noting that especially women interpreted the term in this way, and appreciated things that can reduce their daily workload.

The practical action-related learning and the processes of becoming a good Hmong or Akha human being, respectively, seem to be one and the same for the sample groups (I+II). The concept of human development in group III appears to have been more influenced from outside the community, and another interpretation of education was also found among young and old people in the sample groups as illustrated below, Group IV:

**LAO PDR**  
**HMONG**

**Ban Denkang**

- “We are stupid, because we didn’t go to school”  
(Nang Ka (45), 2001 p.3)
- “...now the education through teachers has taught the children to be clever.”  
(Nang Bounmee (45), 2001 p.3)
- “Although he has no education he receives respect from his own people.”  
(Mr. Ka Tua Xong (67), 2000 p.5)

**Ban Houaytoumay**

- “Before the Akha people did not have education, that is why they are poor.”  
Sohtou (55), village headman, 2000 p.2)
- “Although he receives respect from Akha people, he thinks that when he talks to Lao Loum people, they do not understand him, because he is not educated.... If they [his children] have education they will not be ashamed and other people will respect them.”  
(Mr. Songnah (50), 2000 p.7)

**THAILAND**  
**HMONG**

**Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam**

- “In the past I learnt from my father and the nature around me. Nowadays, children learn Thai literacy in the school, and they can use it in their daily life. So education nowadays is better, it is more comfortable”  
(Mr. Saeng Saewang (45), 2000 p.6)
- “...I teach my children good manners, and teach them something they don’t know. When they go to school, the teacher will teach them to be clever”  
(Mr. Bohleh Saewang (40), 2000 p.10)

- “..., they [the children] will be clever [after having received formal education] and come back and develop the village”  
(Mr. Kachju Saelao (54) village headman, 2000 p.17)
- “...the formal education is systematised from the government policy...”  
(Mr. Koh Saelao (21), village facilitator, 2000 p.49)
- “..., and I learnt how my parents could live without education”  
(Mr. Koh Saelao (21), 2001 p.12)
- “There wasn’t education in the past, so I have never learnt”  
(Mr. Pouah Saelao (42), 2000 p.8)

## **AKHA**

### **Ban Mae Chan Tai**

- “I am literate now, and I can speak Thai”  
(Miss. Supatra Tiupah (9), 2000 p.25)
- “When I can read a book, I am intelligent”  
(Miss Ajum Tiupah (12), 2000 p.26)
- “It can be summarized that the new generation think that educated people are those who have gone to school”  
(Mrs. Chutima Morlaeku at the Round Table Meeting 2001, p.3)

#### **5.1.1.4. Interpretation of Statements from Group IV:**

This understanding of education demonstrates that Hmong and Akha groups as indigenous peoples have been convinced to believe that the only valuable education is the Western(ised) concept, and that their own practices and concepts will not make them “clever”, as they do not systematise their learning in clearly defined academic disciplines. However, it is not a part of the indigenous worldview to describe their learning in well-defined and sharply divided fragments.

The examples from Groups **I-IV** of learning practices and the different interpretations of education and human development can justify several ways of interpreting the data. First, there seems to be quite substantial evidence that for the Hmong and Akha groups education and human development both mean “learning”, expressed in the vertical life-time cycle and the horizontal life-space learning both intrinsically related to all life-style activities (Group **I+II**). An African scholar from an indigenous culture phrases it as follows:



“to grasp clearly the nature and scope of indigenous education, it must be realized that it calls for the widest definition as the process that goes through life, not being limited to time, place or any particular groups of people and its purpose as representing the totality of man’s approved experiences in his culture or society”

(Ocitti 1994:21)<sup>157</sup>

An attempt to describe the indigenous concept of education collides with the Western(ised) quest for precise categorisations linked to the alleged superiority of its worldview, i.e. the search for universal standards versus the reality among indigenous peoples. Some indigenous scholars refer to this as “cognitive and linguistic imperialism” whose predecessor was the “European colonization” and whose present force is globalisation (Battiste and Henderson 2000:11)<sup>158</sup>. Battiste and Henderson argue that the Western researchers’ formal training “...distracts them from developing deeper insights that might lead them into a vast unforeseen realm of knowing... a new *sui generis* (self-generating) path (Ibid., p.39), and therefore the West ...“must allow indigenous knowledge to remain outside itself, outside its representation, and outside its disciplines” (Ibid.,p.38).

Most interviewees stress that the process of learning is always seen in relation to an activity, thus the verbs: to do, to learn, to work, to “improve the human being”, or as Ocitti phrases it: “...to integrate the individual into his society” (Ocitti 1994:22) constitute the real curriculum in the relevant time and place. Benjamin Whorf argues that verb-centred languages that have a totally different structure than Indo-European languages “...create radically different worldviews” (cited in Battiste and Henderson 2000:73). Also Owen Barfield stresses the connection between language and worldviews in arguing that verb-centred languages express “original participation” (Ibid.,p.73) between “perceiver and perceived”, an “embeddedness” with the process in contrast to a noun-based system that is more concerned with the “it-ness” of things. Barfield claims that objects and events in Western languages can be classified in a number of ways and: “It is the convention of naming that determines the classification rather than any perceived qualities in the objects or events themselves” (Ibid., p.74). Thus he is in keeping with Sardar (cf.Chap.2) when he argues that “The people who have the power to decide what a thing will be called have the power to decide reality” (Ibid., p.74). However, as Ocitti assumes: “... conceptual ambiguity contributes to inaccurate understanding of reality”

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. the explanation by Yang Dao Chapter 2, p. 39

<sup>158</sup> The process has also been described as “ontological imperialism” (Livinas cited in Battiste & Henderson 2000:37)

(Ocitti 1994:13). Due to the differences in the perception of reality, the concept and the structure of indigenous education and human development are difficult to understand within the boundaries of Western(ised) epistemology and parameters. Nor can worldviews be fully translated as an academic discipline from a Western(ised) to an indigenous culture. Until indigenous realities and worldviews and hence education are accepted within their own contexts, the intercultural clash will continue to hinder the externally driven development process among indigenous population groups.

Whereas most statements from villagers above on their learning practices reflect their respective intra-group worldview and the value of skills mainly acquired within the community itself, the second way of interpreting human development is expressed by the interviewees who recognise a positive influence from outside the communities (Group **III**).

These interviews suggest the importance of semantics. The word “development” is a term coined in the Western discourse. In Thai language “kanpattana” is the current expression for “development”, but according to Rigg it is “...better translated as ‘modernization’ rather than ‘development’, or it should at least be made clear that it refers to economic growth” (Rigg 1997:48).<sup>159</sup> Until the beginning of the 1960s the word used for “development” was “*wattanatham*” [italics in the original] which “...encompasses all the various elements that might come under the heading ‘human advancement’”. (Ibid.,p.48). Thus in contemporary Thai language “development” denotes something that originates from outside the community, from the government and external donors<sup>160</sup>.

In the Lao PDR “kanpattana” have the same meaning and implications, whereas “*wattanatham*” means “culture”<sup>161</sup>. Interviewees in Group **III** seem to have adopted the concept of “development”, and hence human development not only as influence from outside, but as inputs that are brought to the community in order for it to “develop” in the way that is deemed appropriate according to the national development priorities.

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<sup>159</sup> This allegation is supported by Mr. Prasert Trakansuphakon: In Karen language [pga ma do htaw thaw htaw pga] means “outsider develop us”

<sup>160</sup> In Malaysian/Indonesian [pembangunan] means “to rise up”, and in Myanmar [hpún-hpyò] means “to grow fat/be plentiful” (Rigg 2001:47). Also in other areas of the world the word “development” is encumbered with a specific meaning. According to Associate Professor Pernille Berthelsen, Aalborg University, the term “mandaleo” in kiswahili is associated with what the Tanzanian government and donors carry into effect in the villages.

<sup>161</sup> In the Lao PDR the term “*wattanatham*” is often used together with the verb “bamlung” which means to “nourish” or “nurture”. In connection with education it means to “upgrade” (Mrs. Minavanh Pholsena)

The concept of formal education as *the* valuable education is a denigration of indigenous educational resources either as not having value in itself or as not being a prerequisite for further learning. The problematique cannot be expressed clearer than in the way Vandana Shiva phrases it: “When knowledge plurality mutated into knowledge hierarchy, the horizontal ordering of diverse but equally valid systems was converted into a *vertical* [italics in the original] ordering of *unequal* [italics in the original] systems, and the epistemological foundations of Western knowledge were imposed on non-Western knowledge systems with the result that the latter were invalidated” (Shiva in Sefa Dei et al.:2002:vii).

To summarise the practices and concepts from the many interviews a broad outline is sketched in the diagram below:

Concepts of education and “human development” as interpreted by the Hmong and Akha groups	Purpose of education and human development according to the Hmong and Akha groups
<b>Group I:</b> education and human development are synonyms and indicate a lifelong learning process, primarily an intra-community responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survival (encompassing all life-sustaining knowledge)</li> <li>• Cultural assertion</li> <li>• Capability formation</li> <li>• Ensuring that people can “lead the lives they have reason to value” (Chap.2)</li> </ul>
<b>Group II:</b> Indigenous learning combined with formal education is necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preservation of indigenous learning for life in the mountains</li> <li>• Recognition of formal education as a way of co-existence with the Lao and Thai societies</li> <li>• Hope for the younger generation to be accepted as equals</li> </ul>
<b>Group III:</b> human development is understood as things provided from outside the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modern facilities can contribute to make life physically easier in the mountains</li> <li>• Modern agricultural and preservation methods can contribute to increase the yields</li> </ul>
<b>Group IV:</b> Imposed concept of Western(ised) education onto indigenous communities “will make us intelligent”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assimilation pressure</li> <li>• Homogenisation</li> <li>• Denigration of indigenous cultures</li> <li>• Capital formation for modernisation</li> </ul>

The summarised responses in group **II** and **III** (see above) could indicate that some villagers have adopted the concepts from the modernising Lao and Thai societies, as well as responses expressed in group **IV** reflect that villagers feel that they are unintelligent if they do not accept that formal education is the best option. Therefore one could be led to conclude that indigenous learning practices are no longer considered to be valuable and relevant.

### **5.1.2. Has Indigenous Education become Obsolete in a Modern(ising) Society?**

Studies within other academic disciplines, e.g. religion and anthropology, have substantiated that education among indigenous peoples throughout the world is very similar in purpose, scope, nature and pedagogy. In that respect it is worthwhile to take into consideration a discussion especially among African scholars on the relevance of indigenous education. Despite the fact that the examples are drawn from an African environment the discussion could be transposed to other indigenous societies.

One school of thought claims that there are serious inherent deficiencies in indigenous African education. Accordingly the nature of indigenous education is seen as a hindrance to overcome poverty in the African societies – a challenge that modern education in this opinion is more capable of addressing (Mushi 1989:88). Among the most significant arguments on the shortcomings of indigenous education are:

1. The learning is confined to one's particular clan or tribe with emphasis on specific and immediate relevance. The exchange of experiences with other groups could have created "a common pool of knowledge" (Ibid.,p.88) which might have contributed to a broader understanding of the reasons for poverty, and thereby suggestions for solutions.
2. Mushi underlines the static character of learning as the elders have unrestricted power to interpret the ancestors' value system and natural phenomena, thereby curbing the learner's innate curiosity and her/his suggestions of e.g. how to overcome the evil (Ibid.,p.89).
3. Despite the fact that the ability to reason is an integral part of the learning process, African indigenous education is criticised for placing too much importance on the acquisition of concrete learning skills at the expense of intellectual nurturing which prevents the learner from imagining alternatives, e.g. diseases and famine did not originate from the Gods but might have other causes (Ibid.,p.89)
4. Mushi also accuses indigenous education of gender inequality. The female relatives teach the young girls exclusively about household matters which perpetuates women's situation in these patriarchal communities (Ibid.,p.91).

The major deficiency highlighted by Mushi is that the learners are not encouraged to think critically and "To use Freire's phraseology, the young people were treated as depositories" (Ibid.,p.90). In other words, the learner must adapt to her/his particular society, which maintains the status quo not least with regard to gender inequality. According to this understanding indigenous education does not contain the dynamism necessary for change.

As a general comment to Mushi's viewpoint, Brennan argues that before planning development projects in a multicultural context one must keep in mind that many rural development programmes have been unsuccessful. Brennan asks if the reason could be "...because the methods of implementation were 'Western' and indigenous practices and learning were ignored? Or is it possible that, if the indigenous practices and learning had been sufficiently researched and known, the development project may have been completely re-cast or perhaps not even implemented?"(Brennan 1990:76). Thus according to Brennan one cannot reject indigenous learning as inherently inadequate for a dynamic transformation process; it might turn out to be a "two-way street" (Ibid.,p.75)

To the more specific points expressed by Mushi, Brennan has the following comments: (1) With regard to the argument concerning the confinement of learning to one's own group, he claims that this only makes the development process more difficult, but "...not less important" (Ibid.,p.76). This argument, however, might seem to be rather vague; for the specific group's practice to be accommodated into a wider development process it will depend on e.g. demographic and political circumstances. Ocitti argues that an educational practice restricted to a specific environment is not a deficiency *per se*. He claims that the value of an education system does not lie in its applicability to other settings, but in its relevance for the community or nation "...for which it is intended" (Ocitti 1990:55). Furthermore Ocitti agrees with Brennan maintaining that the lack of interaction between the clans was not due to deficiencies in the specific education system, but was "...mainly political in nature" (Ibid.,p.55). Furthermore education is not the only factor in a development process (Ibid.,p.56). This argument is applicable to other countries on their way to development.

(2) Concerning the teaching of ancestral values undertaken by elders as a static phenomenon, Brennan counters that it might be difficult for elders to teach new knowledge, but he argues that only if a person knows her/his own background fully, s/he will be able to assist in a realistic learning process that leads to change (Brennan 1990 p.76-77). To this argument Ocitti adds, and rightly so, that in any society the elders are the most conservative, but that there is no indication that rural, illiterate people are more conservative than the urban "educated" [my quotation marks] population (Ocitti 1990:57).

(3) The third deficiency that Mushi emphasises revolves around the lack of intellectual training which pinpoints the Western importance attributed to the written word as the only way to a

person's cognitive development. Consequently Brennan must deduct that the education hierarchy that places oral traditions at the bottom also under-values the culture's learning systems. In this connection Brennan asks whether a "teacher" is a better catalyst than an elder to develop the child's mind and nurture her/his creativity? (Brennan 1990 p.77). Ocitti admits that Mushi has a point in claiming that because of the authority of the elders in an indigenous culture, the young people might not be encouraged to be critical. However, Ocitti finds that Mushi is overgeneralising, and overlooking the fact that human relations in an indigenous culture consist of both vertical and horizontal level of communication. It is in the vertical communication where the elders over time teach the young that their minds are not challenged. The horizontal communication, on the other hand, that takes place between the individual and her/his contemporaries, is where creativity is unfolded as well as "...the flexing of intellectual muscles" (Ocitti 1990:58).

(4) As for the inequality between man and women Brennan finds that Mushi does not show sufficient awareness of two central issues. Firstly, one has to examine how the roles of the two genders are defined in their complementarity within the particular society. Brennan asks whether an eventual changed economic situation (e.g. if the man is employed outside of the community), would automatically entail a changed role of the women's responsibilities? Secondly, there is no guarantee that Western education will have any effect on the relationship between men and women (Brennan 1990 p.78-79).

Brennan refrains from judging Mushi's arguments as right or wrong as the latter does pinpoint some shortcomings and limitations of indigenous learning practices. Nor does Brennan claim that indigenous education is the only relevant learning method in a changing world. But what is questioned is, whether Western education methodologies are more capable of overcoming given weaknesses. In addition Brennan pleads for a re-validation of indigenous education as a determinant for successful development.

Ocitti considers Mushi's article as heuristic, because it should spur to further, non-romanticising research on indigenous education in order to find out what has become obsolete, what should be modified and adapted, and which aspects are still best suited to meet the needs of the people (Ocitti 1990:64).

Despite recognised shortcomings, the interviews and the above discussion demonstrate that the characteristics of indigenous education and its pedagogical approach are not useless and obsolete. Special emphasis should be attributed to the inter- and intra-generational communication levels which make the individual a learner, a teacher and a worker at the same time and thereby becoming a resource person for the whole community. As a matter of fact, contextualised learning might be described as the most fundamental quality of indigenous education. Under such conditions the relevance of the learning systems to people's lives cannot automatically be replaced by a curriculum of formal education.

## **5.2. Formal Education provided to Ethnic Minority Groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand**

The poem below illustrates the limitation of formal education as opposed to the usefulness of indigenous learning:

*Ils voulaient nous faire aller à l'école  
Tourner les pages de leurs livres...  
Pourquoi apprendre le langage des livres  
Alors que la forêt nous parle?*

*Les livres ne se mangent pas  
Et les stylos et les crayons sont de pauvres armes  
Pour tuer le daim des montagnes  
Et le sanglier grognant...*

(Gilbert Perez, cited in Rovillos 2000, p.3 [Italics in the original])

The issue of “educational irrelevance” as a part of the endogenous constraints (cf. Chap. 3) has been discussed among educational planners, within academia and in international fora for decades. Newer education assessment reports in the Lao PDR continue to pinpoint the problem with textbooks illustrating the lowland culture as the only valid one, and not reflecting “the multi-ethnic society” (GoL 2004:7). Furthermore, one of the recommendations is to “Review curriculum and textbooks for ethnic bias, revise to include representation of ethnic groups and their history” (Ibid.,p.9). The Thai educational goals to be fulfilled by the year 2007 “...is to be adjusted in harmony with globalization” (GoT 1997:1), and one of the problems to be solved is the “Inappropriate curriculum and learning/teaching processes which do not correspond to the needs of society in its present stage of national development” (Ibid.p.2).

Regardless of the official intentions, there are reasons to be sceptical. In the case of the Lao PDR and Thailand it seems that Hapte has a point on this issue in claiming that “One should not expect sensitivities to equity, disparity, poverty etc., from countries whose regimes follow

and practice inequality, political domination, military solutions to political problems” (Habte cited in Husén 1979:91). Education policies for minority groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand are, in principle, both reflections of the dual objective of national integration and preservation of cultural distinctiveness. However, the policies reflect the concern that the national education programmes be homogenised in service of the market.

### **5.2.1. Formal Education as perceived by Indigenous peoples**

Concerning the freedom to adapt the curriculum to community needs, prominent ethnic groups in Thailand claim that the government is still reluctant to adjustments<sup>162</sup>. The highly praised “Indigenous Knowledge” in the Thai National Education Act as an important element of the new education system seems to have been hollow phrases as pinpointed by the Karen elder during the production of the human development report: “We were told that our old ways were just superstitions and outdated nonsense” (Joni Odochao cited in UNDP 2003:19). Again the Thai ethnic groups are more daring in their criticism than the Lao interviewees. However, a woman from Ban Denkang in the Lao PDR is in agreement with Mr. Odochao when she stated that: “*Because of the project our life has changed in many ways, such as clothing and the practice of some traditions that are backwards. We are happy to have the project in the village, our children can go to school and know more*”. (Nang Ka (45), shaman, 2001 p.3)<sup>163</sup>. She has been convinced that the Hmong practice is backwards, and that schooling is the way out of backwardness.

A very powerful statement from a community representative from one of the Thai ethnic groups, invited to present their points of view in connection with the Human Development Report in Thailand, supports these statements:

“We’re told our old ways and our old knowledge aren’t good any more. The local wisdom and the knowledge passed down from generation to generation are being destroyed...The education system actually helps destroy the old knowledge. Education has been designed to produce people for industry. Learning has become something that is bought and sold. Education is an investment and investors want to get a return on their money. So people who go through schools just end up like cogs in the industrial machine – sometimes without even realizing it. Our capability is actually going down because our self-confidence is ebbing away... We have to survive, but with dignity too”

(Khun Wibun Khemchaloem cited in UNDP 2003:6).

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<sup>162</sup> Statements from Mr. Joni Odochao, the Karen elder during the Round Table Meeting in 2001 p.2 (See Appendix 3, Study 4), and Mr. Prasert Trakarnsuphakorn, (during an interview in September 2005)

<sup>163</sup> A shaman is the religious expert in an indigenous community



### **5.2.2. Are States' Perception of Education Obsolete?**

I find it worthwhile to discuss Khun Wibun's description of formal education as being in the service of the market, because it illuminates the conflictual tendencies in today's world: on the one hand a trend away from centralisation towards diversity where "... the voices of those who were once dispossessed ... silenced by dominant ideologies" are now being raised (Corson 1998:238). In Corson's view the world has never seen stronger assimilationist forces than within capitalist social forces, and they are especially visible in the sphere of education. As Khun Wibun, Corson has no doubt that the worth of something depends on its market value rather than "...according to any intrinsic and real qualities it might have" (Ibid.,p.239). This viewpoint once again brings the debate back to the discrepancy problem behind the formation of human capital often imparted by formal education versus capabilities, ideally envisaged to enhance people's choices. In order to fully recognise that cultural diversity demands attention in the development discourse, and that difference should not be equated with deficiency, one could ask whether the Lao PDR and Thailand and other modernising states' perception of education are not themselves problematical.

The conventional structure of education for indigenous peoples does not comply with the current key feature of validating cultural diversity. According to Corson, several areas within the educational framework need to be reformed<sup>164</sup>. Education programmes build on external (governmental) structures with the internal (community) hardly taken into consideration. The philosophy of education reflects the dominant culture that furthers homogeneity and repression instead of promoting a liberating and bicultural or multi-cultural educational culture. Curricula that are never neutral and teaching methods that are consensus-seeking instead of transformative buttress a perception of education that is reactive instead of proactive.

The stories collected during the field research and the newer statements from indigenous peoples confirm that formal education programmes do not constitute a natural and organic part of indigenous peoples's lives. The organisation of education in institutions instead of being centred around the local community and the top-down led structure that does not include the resources of the community, can hardly be said to be in harmony with the contemporary development rhetoric found in the modernising discourse of people working with, speaking of and living off development issues.

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<sup>164</sup> For the conceptual structure Corson draws on Jackie Daigle: "An examination of community-based education models in first nations communities" (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto 1997)

It must be said, though, that education programmes that involve community resources over the years have won more recognition. The concept of Non-formal education can be considered as a compromise between the indigenous education practice and the externally planned formal education programmes.

### **5.3. Non-formal and Life Skills Education**

As a new concept in the Western development discourse Non-formal education was developed in 1967 by Philip Coombs, who perceived it as a “...new frontier for educational planning” (King K.1991:164). It was seen as a “...criticism of the imbalances and elitism of formal education systems, and as a way of signalling the fact that education was not helping the poorest segments of society” (Ibid., p.167).

Non-formal education should be seen as an essential element in the basic needs strategy that emerged in the 1970s and the decade’s emphasis on rural development. Initially non-formal education was defined as: “...any organized, systematic, educational activity, carried on outside the framework of the formal system, to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (Coombs 1985:23)<sup>165</sup>. The notion was interpreted in various ways according to the ministries’ and organisations’ own priorities, and in many countries equated with adult education (Ibid.,p.22). One of the misconceptions of non-formal education is when it is “...meant solely for the poor and suitable only for developing countries” (Ibid.,p.25). In fact, non-formal education programmes are likewise carried out in so-called developed countries under different names. The ultimate authority was placed under the Ministry of Education, but as King claims the real enthusiasts of the concept were to be found in the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Labour, Small Industries and Co-operatives. (King K.1991:166). The agencies that were earliest involved were IIEP<sup>166</sup>, UNICEF; USAID and the World Bank. The first attempt with Non-formal education was planned for Tanzania in 1967 (Ibid.,p.171), and at the end of the 1970s the concept reached South East Asia.

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<sup>165</sup> Coombs continues: “Thus defined non-formal education includes, for example, agricultural extension and farmer training programs, adult literacy programs, occupational skill training given outside the formal system, youth clubs with substantial educational purposes, and various community programs of instruction in health, nutrition, family planning, cooperatives and the like” (Coombs 1985:23)

<sup>166</sup> International Institute for Educational Planning

The establishment of the Department of Non-formal education (NFE) under the Ministry of Education in **Thailand** in 1979<sup>167</sup> can be seen as a recognition of the formal curriculum's lack of relevance for marginalised people in the formal curriculum. Among the target groups are the “*chao khao*”, which means “the hill tribes” or “the hill people”, in the official designation<sup>168</sup> for the different ethnic groups living in the mountains. NFE programmes can be categorised in three main areas:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Basic Education</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Functional Literacy Programme:</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(basic reading, writing, calculating and problem-solving skills for adult drop- outs)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Hill Areas Education Model:</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(especially designed for ethnic highland residents in the north and west of Thailand)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Continuing Education Programme:</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(for those who want to acquire certificates equivalent to completion of formal schooling. This programme consists of evening classes, distance education (meetings once a week) and self-study)</p>	
<p><b>Vocational Education and Skills Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interest groups<sup>169</sup> (30 hrs)</li> <li>• short vocational course (100 hrs) (at NFE centres and community learning centres)</li> <li>• Vocational Certificate (3 yrs) (equivalent to grade 9)</li> <li>• NFE Occupational Certificate (3 yrs) (upgrading of vocational skills for workers and self-employed)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information Service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public library</li> <li>• village reading centres (built by villagers, newspapers)</li> <li>• community learning centres (various kinds of knowledge for children and adults, e.g. basic education, vocational training and information services)</li> <li>• radio and television services</li> <li>• mobile learning units</li> </ul>

(Deputy Director, Centre for Non-Formal Education, Chiang Rai, 2000)

### 5.3.1. The Hill Areas Education Model in Thailand

The NFE literacy programmes reached the most remote areas, and were the precursor of the thoughts and experience behind the Hill Areas Education (HAE) model. In 1974 USAID<sup>170</sup> assisted the Thai Department of Non-formal Education in co-operation with the department of

<sup>167</sup> In Thailand Non-formal education could be considered as an upgrading of a programme from the 1930s on “Adult Education” that was launched in order to raise the level of literacy nationwide. The programme was rather unsuccessful and was closed down by the outbreak of the Second World War. In the 1970s the literacy campaign made great strides. ([www.logos-net/ilo/150\\_base/en/topic\\_n/t15\\_tha.htm](http://www.logos-net/ilo/150_base/en/topic_n/t15_tha.htm) - Retrieved 25.Oct 2005)

<sup>168</sup> “In Thailand the term ‘indigenous peoples’ has been rejected by the government agencies, although it is estimated that there are no less than 60 language groups throughout the country” (Kesmanee & Trakansuphakorn in Newing 2005:345).

<sup>169</sup> If a minimum of 15 persons are interested in specific skills (e.g. knowledge of markets, engine repair, sewing skills), the Department of Non-formal education in the district will provide a teacher for the 30 hours training.

<sup>170</sup> Once established other international aid agencies contributed to the project.

Public Welfare to develop the HAE model that now forms a part of the overall NFE programmes<sup>171</sup>. The philosophy behind the HAE model can be summarised as follows:

Education and development must respond directly to hill tribe expressed needs and conditions within the framework of national requirements” (DNFE, MoE, Thailand 1985:23). The education programmes must originate from, and be validated by, the hill people “(except in the case of national security, national development and other critical concerns) (Ibid.,p.23).

The implementation of education-development programs and activities which respect tribal identity and are not disruptive of the existing socio-cultural structure must provide for flexibility and acceptability. (Ibid.,p.24)

Education will lead directly to development through the increasing responsibility and authority of the community. (Ibid.,p.24)

The key components in the HAE model are the cluster units (a core village with 4-10 satellite villages comprising core and satellite teachers), the village committees (village representatives, teacher (who also helps the villages in community and agricultural development, and providing primary health care), and the village education centre, “Ashram”<sup>172</sup>, built by the villagers), and the HAE curriculum<sup>173</sup> (1,5 –6 years of learning for adults and children) which is adapted to the life in the mountains, non-graded and based on achievements irrespective of time (Ibid.,p. 28-31). The components are the means to reach the ultimate goal of the HAE model: “Hill tribe communities must be relatively self-reliant within the context of village-government coordination and cooperation” (Ibid.,p.23).

The HAE model appreciates and therefore builds on the resources that already exist among the indigenous peoples, including the spirit of participation<sup>174</sup>. The concept of education is the

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<sup>171</sup> Several other agencies were involved. Among others the Tribal Research Institute, Chiang Mai; Chulalongkorn and Srinakharinwirote universities; educational offices at different levels and teacher training colleges (*The Hill Areas Education Model – The “Ashram” Approach to Community Education-Development*) (DNFE/MoE Thailand 1985:4). As the government did not have the funds, also units of the Border Patrol Police, the Department of Forestry and the Provincial Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Centres placed manpower at the disposal as teachers for the HAE project (Interview with Deputy Director, Achan Damri Janapiraganit, Center for Non-formal education, Chiang Rai, 14. November 2000 p.1). Last but not least “The HAE project was started by people with idealism”(Nichet Sunthornphitak in *On the Road called HAE*, MoE, Thailand 1980: 7)

<sup>172</sup> Achan Damri Janapiraganit, (one of the pioneers in launching the HAE model) explains: “A place called Asom (holy place) or the Community Education Center was opened round the clock (there was not that beginning at 8:30 and finishing at 3:30 PM) to provide education for every villager” (Interview 14. November 2000 p.5)

<sup>173</sup> 20% of the basic skills portion of the curriculum (or 13% of the total) in the HAE model can be chosen by the villagers in co-operation with the teacher, and it changes over time. Examples are organisation of a village co-operative shop, and now topics like AIDS, drugs and child prostitution are among the most relevant topics. However it was seldom used (Achan Damri Janapiraganit (Interview 14. November 2000 p.7)

<sup>174</sup> Participation of the community is considered a crucial factor in the HAE philosophy. Achan Damri Janapiraganit gives an example: “It has been observed that from the beginning teachers had come with only bags. 2-3 months later the villagers would help build a community learning center, which the villagers perceived as a

same as the concept expressed by the researched groups: **“But by education we mean any processes which create learning in life. Education therefore, is part and parcel of all other processes in life”** [bold in the original] (Udom in *On the Road called HAE* 1980:111). Udom continues by claiming that self-reliance<sup>175</sup> and participation “...should include people’s determination of what they want to learn, what they want to know, their learning to earn a living, or their wishes to know about life in the city...”(Ibid.,p.113)

The HAE programmes began in 45 villages in the Northern provinces, and since the end of the pilot phase in 1986 the community-education approach has been extended to 600 villages. The Thai government “...pays quite a lot of attention to the HAE”<sup>176</sup>, which is intended to expand into another 1300 villages. Despite some operational constraints the HAE model has turned out to be very successful, and many national development projects build on the concept<sup>177</sup>. As the biggest achievement Achan Damri confirms that “Wherever we go villagers are interested and

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school, was also the accommodation for the teachers. Then it had been expanded and developed. The villagers had become owners and built by themselves using local materials and as little budget as 4.000 Baht at the beginning to purchase construction materials like nails, cement, sanitary wares etc.” (Interview 14. November 2000 p.4-5)

<sup>175</sup> The self-reliance concept is explained as follows: “...the abilities of thinking, decision making, problem solving or implementation of the community development by the community itself. It means that people in the community participate in the determination of what to do for their own community, and not determined from outside”. Achan Damri Janapiraganit (Interview 14. November 2000 p.7)

<sup>176</sup> Achan Damri Janapiraganit (Interview 14. November 2000 p.6)

<sup>177</sup> Among the organisations in Thailand that adhere to the HAE education and development philosophy I find worth mentioning the following: The **Mountain People’s Culture and Development Educational Programme (MPCDE)**, founded in 1980. The organisation has since been concerned with documenting and creating awareness of existing development problems in the mountains as well as trying to find possible solutions in order for the people to preserve the mountain cultures (Interview with Dr. von Geusau December 2001). **Hill Tribe Education Center (HTEC)**, established in Chiang Rai which trains teachers to be sent to teach in the mountains. The centre creates opportunities for meetings “...between hill tribes and low-land communities” (Interview with Director of HTEC, Mr. Pongthon Chayatuulachat, December 2000 p.3). The centre has set up networks at village, district and provincial levels as well as between countries (Ibid.,p.3). The objectives of **Hill Areas Development Foundation (HADF)**, founded in 1986, by a former member of the HAE development team, are to build the capacity of the villagers’ organisations “emphasizing on their true demands” through rules and regulations, to make villagers able to communicate with town people and teach about the obligations of being a citizen. Gender equality has improved considerably in the villages over the last ten years: Now “Women would play a more active role in collective activities such as learning, meetings, training etc., because the attitude of both the community and men has been changed” (Interview with Head of Information and Planning Section, Mrs. Juthama Rajchaprasit, December 2000 p. 3). As introduced by the HAE model the education activities of the project (mainly within environmental issues) focus on “the flexibility, interest and demand of the learners” (Ibid.,p.1), hence an important concern of the HADF is the adaptation of new technology to indigenous peoples’s lives (Ibid.,p.5). The **Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT)**, founded in 1993, is an indigenous NGO staffed entirely by representatives of the indigenous peoples. The Association works with 190 indigenous communities (Pga k’nyau [Karen], Hmong, Mien, Lisu, Lahu and Akha) in eight provinces in northern Thailand. Any education and development programme builds on the HAE philosophy and the ultimate goal of IMPECT is “...self-reliance in all areas of development work in line with each indigenous group’s own traditional knowledge” (Interview with Deputy Director Mr. Kittisak Ruttanakrajangsri, December 2000). A major concern for IMPECT and the biggest challenge is the human rights issue in terms of right to own education practices “cultural revival”, land rights and citizenship. IMPECT seeks to empower the different groups by raising awareness and by forming tribal, national and international networks.

satisfied”, because the HAE model recognises “...that educational values inherited from antiquity are the essential things for life”(Interview 14<sup>th</sup> November 2000 p.10).

The present Community Learning Centres (CLC) e.g. in the researched Hmong and Akha villages, where non-formal education (NFE) is offered, is a direct continuation of the former HAE Ashrams, and the content as well as the teaching methods in all NFE activities are in keeping with the HAE philosophy, albeit in reduced form and content. The quoted comments below represent significant statements from the community members and the CLC teachers in the researched villages:

### **Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam**

- *“The NFE learning can take place anywhere, the students can wear their own clothes, and they can be absent when their parents need them for work. The lessons are a mix of indigenous learning and Thai curriculum”*  
(Mr. Kachju Saelao (54), village headman 2000 p.15)
- *“I think it is good for inferior people. Especially hill tribe people”.... The expense for studying is not much. I only pay the registration fee, but I can study at home. I would like to speak Thai language”.*  
(Mr. Sathra Saesong (23), literacy class attendant 2000 p.41-42)
- *“NFE is systematised to combine everything, but the FE [formal education] is systematised from the government and is much more formal than NFE”*  
(Mr. Koh Saelao (21), village facilitator 2000 p.49)
- *“ ...but the HAE model is focused on the practice outside the classroom, and the students will use the knowledge in their daily life” – the age and the sex of the students are not important...the lessons are up to the interest of the students....I bring the students to learn about indigenous wisdom of the village such as basketry, blacksmithing and herbal medicine. Sometimes I invite the experts [from the village] to teach my students at the learning centre...For HAE model the learning is focused on indigenous wisdom which interests the villagers. The villagers can use that wisdom to improve their quality of life”.*  
(Mr. Nathawat Kankep (29) CLC teacher, 2000 p.56-57)

### **Ban Mae Chan Tai**

- *“The CLC is good because the children are able to study...If we didn’t have the CLC we would never have had this opportunity to give this interview, and then people might think that their culture is not important”*  
(Mr. Lhoyoum Mayao (36) village headman, 2000 p.4)

The Community Learning Centre teacher underlines 6 differences between the formal and non-formal education:

Formal Education	Non-Formal Education
<i>"The curriculum is not flexible to the situation, environment and community life</i>	<i>The HAE <u>curriculum</u> is <u>applicable to community life</u></i>
<i>Receives children from the age of 5, and they continue in primary 1-6, and continue until secondary 3.</i>	<i>There are <u>adult learners</u> and some of the <u>children</u> are more than 14 years of age when they start</i>
<i>The formal school learn more in class..., and there are teachers in every class</i>	<i>The HAE system uses <u>integration with in- and out- of- class learning</u>, and the teacher does every job in the CLC</i>
<i>The formal school co-ordinates less with other agencies</i>	<i>The CLC teacher <u>must coordinate with</u> GO, NGOs and <u>the villagers</u></i>
<i>The formal education system is more ready to divide the responsibilities in sections</i>	<i>The HAE has <u>only one teacher</u> and s/he has much responsibility including teaching and coordinating and organising village activities</i>
<i>The formal school has a permanent school with classrooms, library, nurses room, agriculture room etc.</i>	<i>The class room in the NFE system is so little, there are kitchen, sleeping room and store room in the CLC, so there is <u>only one room for teaching and learning</u>"</i>

(Mr. Jarin Wannarug (31), CLC teacher 2000, p.22)

The next quotation is an answer to the question of which topics are the most important in the NFE learning and why:

- *"Ability to think, ability to do and ability to solve problems are the important principles. Because ability to think is the basis of doing anything. One should think before doing, and then one can solve the problems"*

(Mr. Jarin Wannarug (31), CLC teacher, 2000 p.22)

To the question concerning the biggest challenges for the Community Learning Centre, the teachers in the Hmong and Akha villages responded similarly that they had both found resistance from the villagers when the idea of constructing a centre CLC with the help of the villagers was introduced.

The initial negative attitude of the villagers in connection with the construction of a Community Learning Centre could be interpreted as a reaction to previous experiences: yet another project designed from outside without the villagers' participation as well as the

expectation to a school whose curriculum and methods probably would be irrelevant for the community and make demands on the children who were needed for work.

However, once the villagers realized that the concept of the HAE model resembled their own understanding of education and that the objectives were to assist the villagers in improving their self-reliance, the negative attitude was converted into fruitful co-operation. The non-formal education opportunities have entailed that the indigenous groups can enhance their life-skills and hence solve occurring problems in the community and through literacy classes and television programmes in the CLC learn about the outside world. Thus, the ideas adopted from the HAE philosophy appears to offer a valuable and appropriate alternative to and/or a necessary educational supplement for the hill tribes in Thailand.

### **5.3.2. Community –Based Education in the Lao PDR**

The Education for All Conference in 1990 assisted the education authorities in the Lao PDR to realise the need for changes in order to fulfil the education development goals. In 1991 the Lao Government and UNICEF agreed on a 5-year plan (1992-96) for basic education at the national level with special focus on rural and minority children<sup>178</sup>. The project's justification is "...that the education presently offered is not relevant to the community or to individual needs, nor is it of sufficient quality "The causes of the lack of relevance and the poor quality were that the present educational system is geared towards main population groups and an international formal approach..."<sup>179</sup> Hence the strategy stated that:" The development-education must always build on, and not conflict with, existing community and ethnic structures, practices and institutions". Among the primary activities were organising "...study tour to observe and learn from the Hill Areas Education in northern Thailand...". The Ministry of Education established a national Centre for Non-formal education in mid-1992 under the Department of Non-formal education, and the following years regional NFE centres were established as well as Community Learning Centres following the Thai model in 8 provinces. Concerning the scope of the project, the intention was that it should encompass more than literacy<sup>180</sup>, "...which has

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<sup>178</sup> *Basic Education Programme (UNICEF/MOE) in L'évaluation de l'éducation pour tous à l'an 2000:Rapport des pays/Lao PDR* Retrieved at [www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/laos/rapport\\_1\\_1.html](http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/laos/rapport_1_1.html) (7. November 2005)

<sup>179</sup> "Education for Ethnic Minorities UNDP/LAO/92/01" in *Evaluation de l'éducation pour tous à l'an 2000: Rapport des Pays/LAO PDR*. Retrieved at [www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/laos/rapport\\_1\\_1.html](http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/laos/rapport_1_1.html) (7. November 2005)

<sup>180</sup> In 1993 the Women's Literacy and Basic Skills Training was launched as a part of the Non-formal education initiative like in Thailand. A part from literacy this the programme also encompassed various skills training such as sewing, weaving, health and sanitation topics and revolving funds. (*Women's Literacy and Basic Skills Training (UNESCO/504/Lao/11)* in *Evaluation de l'éducation pour tous à l'an 2000: Rapport des pays :LAO PDR*. Retrieved at [www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/laos/rapport\\_1\\_1.html](http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/laos/rapport_1_1.html) (7. November 2005)



little relevance per se”. The ultimate goal of this new initiative was “...to facilitate integration of these most disadvantaged groups into the monetarised sector of the economy<sup>181</sup>” An external evaluation was carried out in 1998. The report found major positive achievements at all levels, and underlined that when measuring the outcomes it should be taken into account that the NFE concept was rather new in the Lao PDR, and this could explain some of the limited positive results.

The adoption of the HAE philosophy in the Lao PDR was intended to meet the needs of the minority groups. However, the findings from the evaluation brought to light that the implementation was too top-down and the closing down of some centres similar to the Thai CLCs was due to lack of interest among the learners. This was most likely due to the fact that the content of the curriculum was not relevant and did not correspond to the learners’ tradition, as well as the teaching being conducted in the Lao language.<sup>182</sup> It is recognised generally that in education, the question of language is essential. Few educators, if any, would contest that the mother tongue is the ideal especially in the beginning of the learning process for both children and adults. A Hmong scholar expresses it as follows:

Du point de vue psychologique, elle [the mother tongue] représente un système de symboles qui fonctionne automatiquement dans son esprit lorsqu’il veut s’exprimer ou comprendre. Du point de vue sociologique, elle le rattache étroitement à la collectivité dont il fait partie. Du point de vue pédagogique, elle lui permet d’apprendre plus rapidement qu’il ne ferait dans une autre langue mal connue de lui.

(Yang Dao in Lytton 1994 p.38)

The discussion concerning the language of instruction still remains an unsolved problem like in many other countries with multi-cultural population groups.. Another serious critique of the NFE programmes and contrary to the objectives of the HAE concept was that the village authorities were not involved at any stage of the project.<sup>183</sup>

Nevertheless, the interviewees in the researched Hmong and Akha villages expressed satisfaction with the offer to follow NFE classes. A woman in Ban Denkang gives her opinion on both non-formal and formal education:

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<sup>181</sup> See footnote 171

<sup>182</sup> A later assessment report confirms that despite the importance of the NFE programmes “...such training is often non-responsive to community needs” (UNDP (a): Common Country Assessment: The Lao PDR 2000:53)

- *“NFE is provided to Hmong people because they don’t understand Lao and about education. Now the children want to learn. Now Hmong can produce many things because of education. Now people want to send their children to school and they want to be healthy like other ethnic groups. They moved to live in the plains and send their children to school. Now there is education, the children can go to school unlike their parents who are not clever.”*

(Nang Ka (45) 2001 p.3)

Her statement should be seen in light of the fact that Ban Denkang is a resettled village. Her statement might also be influenced by the constant attention from the government. However, one should not doubt the value of NFE activities for the villagers, neither should her wish to want another life for her children as literate in Lao language be questioned. Nevertheless, her statement is yet another example of internalised self-understanding of villagers as “not clever”, because they have not been submitted to formal education in the Western(ised) sense of the word.

The teacher in Ban Denkang sees both positive and negative aspects of the non-formal education programmes:

- *“There have been non-formal classes in the village for 4 years in order to teach adults above 15 years of age to know Lao language, to calculate, to raise animals, to grow vegetables and to know about sanitation. Non-formal education can be dangerous for the children e.g. drug prevention curriculum – when the children see the pictures they want to try opium. However, it is good to teach the children to grow rice and raise animals. The life of the adults who attend non-formal classes have changed e.g. they are cleaner and they can teach their siblings. They can understand Lao and they can do trading and they don’t need an interpreter and friends when they go outside the village”*

(Mr. Bi Moua (27) TPA, 2000 p.7)

Mr. Bi Moua stresses the importance of the practical and life-supporting NFE activities for the community’s development. Concerning the drug prevention curriculum, there might be some truth in his reservation concerning its possible negative influence. On the other hand, young people’s eventual experiments with drugs might as well be connected to the availability of drugs along an increasingly busy road<sup>184</sup>.

The positive, almost grateful attitude towards the NFE- programmes in the Lao PDR as well as in Thailand among the interviewees in the researched and non-researched villages is challenged by the critical Akha specialist, von Geusau:

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<sup>184</sup> Ban Denkang is situated along the road that connects the northern Lao PDR with China and Burma. Amphetamine produced in Burma constitutes an increasing problem in the Golden Triangle.

“NFE is very confusing. It started as an idealistic system to conserve the culture as it is handed over from generation to generation, but in practice it became exactly something that marginalised people. People who wanted to study in the national system which is important if they don’t want to be more marginalised, had to go to Lao schools or Thai, Burmese or Chinese schools because they lived in these countries. They cannot link the NFE curriculum to the curriculum of the elementary school. You need lowland education to go as far as possible, but besides that you need Akha education”<sup>185</sup>

This statement could be interpreted as if von Geusau considers the non-formal education approach as a kind of third system that is unjustifiably squeezed in between the inherent non-formal learning in the Akha culture and the formal education that will give the mountain people the opportunity to become “modernised”. According to him the NFE model creates false expectations among the attendants and the approach is an unsuited foundation for continuing the formal curriculum. A somewhat similar, ironical critique of the NFE-programmes comes from the new left. According to Coombs these critics “...condemned Western-style formal education as a conspiracy of capitalists to retain their power by training docile and obedient workers who could be exploited” (Coombs 1985:23). Consequently, they now rejected the NFE concept as a fraud that would only make people believe that they were given “... the real thing” (Ibid.,p.23). Bringing the discussion to the real conditions, one could argue that both points of view can only have academic interest as the indigenous peoples are already marginalised, and that NFE is accepted as a way towards non-marginalisation.

In essence Hill Areas Education, non-formal education and community-based education are concepts that share the same ideological assumptions and to a certain extent similar pedagogical approaches towards community development: i.e. respect for existing indigenous educational resources, genuine participation from the community and flexibility in the learning processes. Together with indigenous learning practices these concepts are central to cultural and linguistic assertion and revival.

The field research undertaken in the two countries seems to show that this approach is more successful in Thailand than in the Lao PDR. The HAE model has a longer history in Thailand, it is implemented on a larger scale, and foreign aid agencies have been allowed earlier participation. Ronald Renard, a well-known researcher on Thai politics, claims that the Thai development workers, including NFE teachers, use role models in persons from the royal family who initiate and follow development projects very closely. There might be some truth in

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<sup>185</sup> Interview 12th December 2001

this claim, and it is a fact that similar role models do not exist in the Lao PDR. But the apparent Thai success might also be ascribed to the fact that there is more political room to manoeuvre in capitalist Thailand than in socialist Lao PDR.

The strong government control in the Lao PDR is also one of the major reasons why foreign aid agencies are mainly involved in non-formal and community –based education activities. At the same time as the country is opening up to the outside world, the Lao Government insists on forging a “culturally new man”, and formal education is considered the main instrument to achieve this goal.

### **5.3.3. Foreign assisted Education in Thailand and the Lao PDR**

One of the foreign agencies with the biggest scope and the most tangible impact among Thailand’s hill tribes is the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). The Thai-German Highland Development Programme (TG-HDP) was one of the longest running of the externally-supported Thai highland development projects at 17 years<sup>186</sup>. The project started in 1981 and the fourth phase ended in 1998. From the outset the intention was to integrate all areas of rural development (i.e. farming, livestock production, services like health, education and community development). Like most Western-managed development agencies the TG-HDP began the traditional way by transferring knowledge through formal pre-planned training programmes. The objective of the training activities was to “...*assure transfer of know-how to the participants in the development process*” [italics in the original] (Leesuwan & Kampe 1995:7). Apart from people in the rural areas the training programmes also targeted project personnel and civil servants. The main focus was on technical and supervisory skills. In 1985 the Training Unit introduced the concept of “Human Resource Development” that was defined as “...*the process that leads to active participation of the target groups so that they strengthen their own capabilities and they act on their own responsibility*” [italics in the original] (Ibid.,p.7).

The human resource development definition below shows that the former emphasis on training and transfer of knowledge from external sources has now moved more towards use of internal resources:

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<sup>186</sup> The longest running national hill tribe project in Thailand and the largest in terms of scope and personnel is the Royal Project.

HRD defined:

“HRD is the process of realizing the potentials embodied in people, both individually and collectively. HRD programmes create and provide opportunities for people to develop and to use their potentials. The focus is on knowledge, skills, attitude, motivation and behaviour”

HRD Objectives:

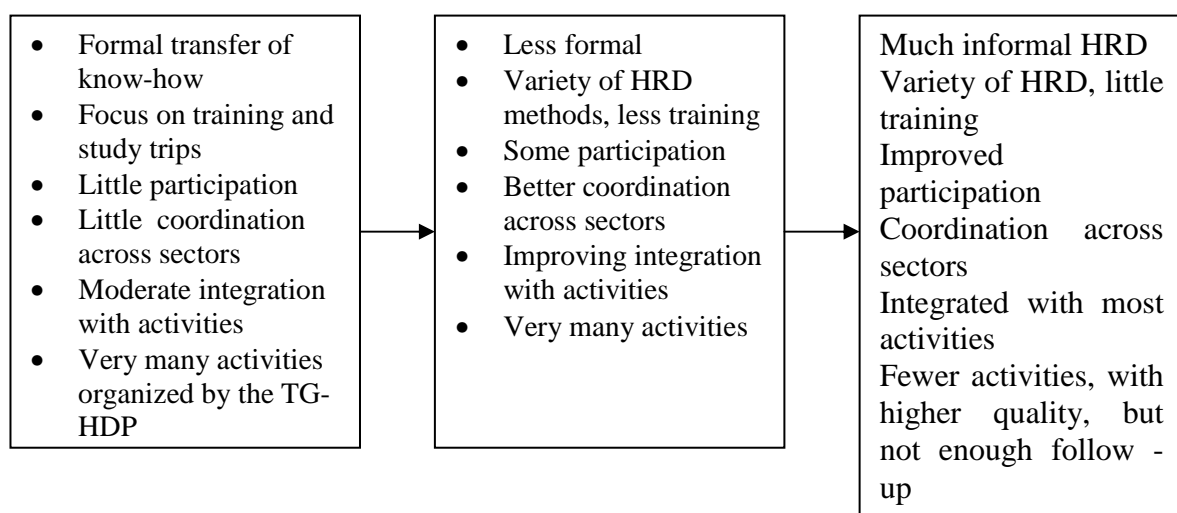
HRD shall be utilized as a means:

- to introduce and strengthen necessary knowledge, skills and understanding.
- to improve communication function and quality so as to improve mobilization and utilization of human resources.
- to increase opportunities for the involvement of individuals and groups in all phases of a development process.
- to enrich and strengthen conceptual and practical understanding about the role of individuals in development while contributing to a people oriented development approach

(Boyce & DelVecchio 1990: 8-9)<sup>187</sup>

In principle, the definition recognises that anyone has an innate potential that can be nurtured and strengthened in a change process if the right opportunities are offered. The skills and knowledge that should be taught are intended to be relevant, “necessary”, to the people’s lives, and finally, the objectives encompass the endeavour to make people able to take part in all decisions that pertain to their situation at whatever level.

A study of the project in 1994-95 revised the changes in the HRD concept that the TG-HDP had gone through since the beginning of the first phase in 1981. A brief illustration of these changes is shown below:



(Leesuwan & Kampe 1995:28)

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<sup>187</sup> According to GTZ: “Human resource development is not something new. HRD is a commonly used term that has different meanings for different people. Simply, we can consider that HRD has existed ever since man and women transferred know-how to their peers and their children. Whether people were involved in hunting, gathering or cultivating, there was a need to exchange information and skills within a given time period.” (Ibid.,p.iii)

According to the authors of the study, the evolution of HRD philosophy of the TG-HDP over the years shows that the project has demonstrated capacity to learn from experiences, to appreciate the effectiveness of the existing “learning-by-doing” processes, and that a transformational participatory approach will lead to the best results for the target groups. Hagen Dirksen gives this advice for future development assistance: “...build trust and respect; and recognize that combining indigenous, local knowledge and skills with formal knowledge leads to sustainable progress”<sup>188</sup>

Sustainable development through real participation with the target groups is also essential for World Education (WE)<sup>189</sup>, an international NGO with more than 20 years working experience in the Lao PDR. The organisation has mainly supported the Department of Non-Formal Education in its efforts to reach the most remote areas. Among the many projects the NGO has been involved in, is a community development project in Salavan and Attapeu provinces in the South of the country. 40% of the population in Salavan province and 67% in Attapeu belong to 12-15 different ethnic minority groups. The main objective of the assistance was to “develop a locally directed community education and action program” (Kampe 1995:i). An evaluation report from this project (after one year) is significant to illustrate the philosophy of World Education. It is characteristic for the organisation to take time to listen to the target groups, a procedure that was followed by the evaluator in terms of reporting the community members’ own comments. Some of the target villages accepted the conventional concept of “development” as material assistance handed down from above and imposed for decades, while others claimed that they had always had their own indigenous view of development. (Kampe 1995:5-6).

*“The Katang have always had the concept of ‘development’. It means changing one’s life for the better”*  
(A committee member in Sapone village) (Ibid.,p.26)

This implies that changes are the responsibility of the community itself, and that the role of e.g. the

*“They are illiterate. They have to be literate before developing”*  
(Ibid.p,25)

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<sup>188</sup> Hagen Dirksen was the Senior Adviser of the TG-HDP from 1989 to 1998. The advice was given at the Highland Symposium on Sustainable Development on 15 November 2004. Retrieved from [www.highlandssymposium.net/resources/press\\_151104-2.asp](http://www.highlandssymposium.net/resources/press_151104-2.asp)

<sup>189</sup> World Education is a private voluntary organisation founded in 1951. The organisation provides assistance in areas pertaining to non-formal education: community development, environmental education, integrated literacy programmes, health care, HIV/AIDS education, adult literacy programmes and refugee training. The approach is characterised by a commitment to equal partnership and based on trust and promotion of local autonomy. (Retrieved from [www.worlded.org/weinternet/aboutus/index.cfm-12](http://www.worlded.org/weinternet/aboutus/index.cfm-12). December 2005)

government and others would however be appreciated in terms of technical information and finances. From the report it appears that the provincial officials still had the conventional concept of development as plans and physical structures.

The concept of “literacy” versus “learning” was another controversial issue that the report found worthwhile to delve into. A representative from the provincial educational authorities involved in the project expressed the official attitude towards the intervention in unambiguous terms (referring to the villagers):

The World Education staff members do not discard the value of literacy, only questioned the die-hard understanding of literacy for its own sake. The WE staff contested the convention that literacy has to precede development. On the contrary, it was essential for the staff to challenge the officials from the Education Section as well as the Lao Women’s Union about the difference between “literacy” and “learning”. Literacy is a learning tool that should be contextualised. The evaluation report gives an example of how literacy can be meaningful: the biggest problem in the area was malaria. Hence the real-life learning was to teach people to read and write the words “mosquito” and “malaria” etc. This shows how malaria prevention was taught in practice and theory, a real-life development process and an example of how the project paid more attention to learning than to standard literacy (Kampe 1995 p.6-7).

The evaluation report presents more examples of the how the foreign staff seeks to support the development in the villages by building on the existing knowledge and combining it with new technology.

All discussions and the participatory planning sessions took place in the Community Learning Centres similar to the Hill Areas Education model in Thailand.

*“We, the project staff, have learned from the villagers”*  
(Project staff member)  
(Ibid.,p.15)

*“The heart of this project is the coordination and exchange between the persons involved”*  
(Women’s Union official)  
(Ibid.,p. 4)

The evaluation report concludes that the biggest merit of the foreign initiated intervention within all areas of community development was the revolutionary challenge to the current concepts of what constitutes legitimate development assistance and understanding of education both among government staff and villagers. (Kampe 1995:17).

Another American-funded NGO, Consortium<sup>190</sup>, (a consortium of three education-focused NGOs) works in collaboration with World Education and shares the same respect for local knowledge and emphasis on relevance in education. Consortium is the driving force in a newer initiative in the Lao PDR: a pilot project of integrated life-skills curriculum. The rationale behind the program is the deepening crisis in the Lao education sector in general. The Education Department in Xieng Khouang Province, in the Northeast, asked Consortium to help develop a life-skills curriculum for grade 5 in primary school as an attempt to reform the standard curriculum. The project was initiated during the school year 2004-2005 in one school<sup>191</sup>. The trial curriculum constitutes from 10-20% of the normal curriculum taught in grade 5.

In many schools in the Lao PDR there are specific extra-curricular topics such as drugs, AIDS and UXO<sup>192</sup> dangers, but as the first evaluation report states: “It was acknowledged that something more attuned to changing realities in Xieng Khouang and the Lao PDR, and the coping abilities required was needed, particularly reasoning and critical thinking skills” (Kampe 2005:2).

Although the concept of life-skills is still under development, (by UNICEF, Consortium and others), topics like health issues, environmental awareness and pollution seemed to have had a positive impact on the school milieu as well as on the local surroundings. According to the evaluator, the fruitfulness of the new approach and the growing enthusiasm is due to several factors: a) an innovative child-centred methodology (e.g. group work, playing, song and games) activated the children, b) teachers and education officials showed a growing acceptance of learner-centred instead of teacher-centred methods as well as recognising the children’s potential to critical thinking, and c) increased participation of parents and local authorities (e.g. village headmen and National Front) in terms of school maintenance, assistance in their children’s homework as well as in PTAs (Ibid.,p.2-6). The pilot project started in an urban area, but a Consortium staff member adds that it is the intention to continue and expand at a

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<sup>190</sup> “The Consortium was formed in 1979 in response to the needs of Indochinese refugees and the Governments who offered them asylum...the Consortium program has been gradually shifting its emphasis from primarily providing assistance to repatriates to implementing longer term sustainable development programs which also benefit other communities and disadvantaged groups in the society at large. The Consortium focuses on using a participatory approach to development to ensure that all of the people involved in the project (especially the villagers) have the opportunity to be part of the overall process. The Consortium believes that the strength of its Laos program lies with the Lao staff. Therefore, the organisation encourages its staff to learn, grow, and to be responsible for as much of the program as possible” (NGO Directory of NGOs in the Lao PDR 2000:28)

<sup>191</sup> In Phon Savanh, Paek District



slow pace to other areas to other sub-urban areas with pupils belonging to ethnic minorities, mostly Hmong<sup>193</sup>.

The World Education and Consortium examples education projects are exponents of an integrated education-cum-development approach. The foreign-initiated progressive and reflexive pedagogy, the transformational participative methods, the encouragement to a more horizontal structure within government institutions as well as a conceptual “re-education” of government officials could contribute to necessary reforms within human development policies.

#### **5.3.4. What can States learn from Aid Education Philosophy?**

Although the above mentioned progressive examples seem to be compatible with the recognition of cultural diversity as well as in line with the demand for a revision of aid to education they must be considered as exceptions. Lending institutions, multilateral international organisations, bilateral donors from the West (and Japan) and finally NGOs (often sub-contractors to the above institutions) constitute another, powerful and potentially treacherous kind of interest groups with a predetermined agenda in the Lao PDR and Thailand. The heterogeneity and cultural diversity of developing countries do not constitute the biggest concern in all aid programmes.

On the basis of 17 years of research and evaluation on education provided to indigenous peoples in the Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, Kampe concludes “...that the principal thrust of all foreign aid and projects targeted indigenous peoples as preferred recipients were designed to provide access to state schooling, an education conducted in the national language and dominated by curricula objectives originating in the capital city” (Kampe (a) 1997:155). Another result of the observations was that especially the lending institutions allocate most of their funds to infrastructure. An AsDB funded education project intended to spend from 60 to 80 percent of the total expenditures on the construction of school buildings (Ibid.,p.156). The rationale seems to be: The precondition for any education is the building, and the educational activities will automatically follow, like in Western(ised) philosophy and practice. However,

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<sup>192</sup> UXO = Unexploded Ordnance, remains from the Second Indochina War (the US bombing of communist targets in the Lao PDR began in May 1964)

<sup>193</sup> Interview with Arthur Crisfield, Consortium, Vientiane, 12. September 2005

the considerable number of empty schools along the roadside in the three countries makes it abundantly clear that this does not apply to developing countries.

The prominence of hard ware, mainly funded by the bigger foreign institutions, is perhaps the most visible sign of the dependency on Western assistance; but the role of the NGOs, of which many have the indigenous peoples as targets, represent a more blurred picture. Foreign NGOs are the organisations that most clearly claim to build on indigenous philosophy, and in principle they are physically closer to these vulnerable groups. However, the critique of NGOs has increased in recent years, and one of the main points of the criticism must be said to be justifiable: “Elles [the NGOs] dépendent donc de l’orientation idéologique et pratique des bailleurs de fonds” (*Alternative Sud* 1997:26). As sub-contractors of Western donors the NGOs are prone to become upwards accountable, and thereby they deceive both their own visions and the indigenous communities. Parallel to the researcher who feels safe with the legal paradigms in her/his luggage, the Western technical assistant in a project feels safe with his “... exogenously formulated plans, studies, statistics and reports” (Arnst in McCaskill & Kampe 1997:451). S/he is inculcated with a Western worldview which also implicates that “...product takes precedence over process”<sup>194</sup> (Ibid.,p.450) which is contrary to indigenous thinking. The technical advisor’s local counterpart is rarely indigenous, but as a rule belongs to the majority population. In the Lao PDR and Thailand this constitutes a cultural barrier, as a Buddhist official is not likely to oppose a foreign development agent. (Milloy & Payne in McCaskill & Kampe 1997:431).

Inter-personal cultural clashes create difficulties, but James Petras takes the critique of the NGOs a political step further. From a class point of view he argues that there is a discrepancy between the self-image of the NGOs as frontliners of civil society, “... a Third Way between “authoritarian statism” and “savage market capitalism” and the reality. Petras sees the NGO rhetoric as the discourse of self-appointed spokespersons for the grassroots (portrayed as a homogenous entity) as making a conscious or unconscious contribution in order to camouflage class divisions and exploitation of subordinate groups. In this optic the NGOs operate as reactionary middlemen for the foreign neo-liberal forces, and contribute to the polarisation of the society in which they work (Petras 1999 p.430-431). This position is in agreement with the editorial of *Alternative Sud* in the analysis of the societal effects of the NGO assistance.

Although they have appointed themselves as advocates of change in relation to the situation of the poor, the foreign NGOs “... peuvent en effet servir de fait à la reproduction du système social existant, éventuellement le renforcer ou rendre la transformation plus difficile” (*Alternative Sud* 1997:27).

As a matter of fact NGOs, including the ones that are present in the Lao PDR and Thailand, are faced with a serious problem. Although financed from abroad, they are institutional orphans in the recipient countries. Thus in order to be allowed to work in the country, they have to comply with the country’s education policy. This adds to the fact that they become tools of two kinds of imperialism: as bearers of an external ideological neo-colonialism and an extension of internal, culturally oppressive imperialism of the dominating majority<sup>195</sup>.

#### **5.3.5. What has been learned?**

The responses and life stories from the groups under study, the “triangulated” interviews from other Hmong and Ahka groups, the statements of indigenous thinkers’ the local development organisations, government officials, independent assessment reports, the extended research on education programmes in the Southeast Asian region, as well as the more general critique of foreign assisted projects in education as a component of human development policy, all seem to agree that the nationally planned formal education programmes is an expression of national cultural imperialism, that might also be influenced by prevailing foreign development philosophy.

The field research has substantiated that there are no significant differences in the worldview concerning education and human development among the researched Hmong and Akha groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand. Their learning is still valuable because it is life-sustaining in every aspect of the term. According to the indigenous worldview learning is an intentional, practical and all-encompassing experience as compared with a Western theoretical, pre-planned and rather fragmented education philosophy. Everybody is given responsibility within the community according to their abilities, and the indispensable inter-generational

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<sup>194</sup> The role of the media should not be forgotten both in terms of the demand for showing tangible results of development assistance as well as in terms of diffusion of Western culture

<sup>195</sup> Philip Altbach argues that “Even nations which have never been under colonial domination, such as Thailand, Liberia, and Ethiopia, came under Western educational influence because of increased foreign aid and technical assistance...” (in Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin: *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 1995:454)

communication is perhaps the most important, as it is crucial for creating the sense of belonging, continuity and identity, that many other societal constructions strive for.

The formal education programmes seem to contribute to a rupture of this inter-generational development related structure. The present field research shows the same results as the longer studies undertaken by Kampe in the three South East Asian countries: most formal education materials impart derogatory attitudes towards ethnic minority groups. Indigenous peoples have for years inculcated a sense of inferiority that has made them believe that their own epistemology is insignificant and valueless. Most often the result is a damaging loss of self-esteem (Kampe (a) 1997: 157).

The denigration of indigenous learning concepts and practices is a contributory factor to a mutual distrust between the minority groups and the state. The state's claim as the only legitimate body with the capacity to carry out education affects the indigenous peoples's perception of the state. Instead of considering it as a protector of all its citizens, many indigenous peoples look upon the state with a lack of trust that reinforces their sense of being second-class citizens, and strengthen the allegiance with their kin groups in the neighbouring countries. The spiritual transnationality of indigenous peoples makes the authorities inclined to doubt their loyalty to the nation. This distrust is perhaps more noticeable in the Thai case, where the security argument is used as an excuse for not granting citizenship to a large percentage of members of highland ethnic groups.

The authorities in both the Lao PDR and Thailand support the non-formal education programmes, and notwithstanding some critique, this approach seem to create a learning environment that recognises the value of indigenous learning concepts and practices. Some enlightened government officials in the two countries together with some foreign aid agencies validate local knowledge and resources, and encourage genuine participation. The field research showed that the indigenous peoples themselves consider the non-formal education curriculum as a supplement to their own practices as well as it can serve as a stepping stone to the continuation of further formal studies.

Non-formal education can be characterised as “embedded education”<sup>196</sup>, an all-encompassing learning process for indigenous population groups in general. The following chapter will elaborate on the concept from a theoretical point of view, since dichotomies between different kinds of learning could be compared with different kinds of viewpoints in theories that are applicable in future development discourses

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<sup>196</sup> The term “embedded” is also used in a more narrow way, connected with literacy: “embedded literacy”. There are key literacy categories such as 1: religious literacies (e.g. those who can read a specific religious text but nothing else), 2: occupational or livelihood literacies (often called commercial or economic literacies), 3: family literacies (the way in which family members interact through texts), and 4: standard or schooled literacy) Alan Rogers: “Literacy and Productive Skills: Embedded Literacies” in *Adult Education and Development 2005 Vol 65*, p.61

## CHAPTER 6: DEVELOPMENT THEORIES FACING SOCIETAL CHANGE IN A MULTI - ETHNIC CONTEXT

Different actors in development are eager to articulate the discourse of millennium goals<sup>197</sup>, and the buzzwords are legion. On the one hand the Western development aid rhetoric pleads for more attention to human rights, empowerment and equality with special focus on the marginalised groups in Third World countries. On the other hand, the complexity related to the more liberal market policy leads to a growing polarisation in poor countries apparently regardless of existing different political ideologies. The Hmong and Akha groups in the Lao PDR and Thailand are illustrative examples of how indigenous peoples are powerless and yet important pawns in the development discourse.

The first part of this chapter discusses the development prospects for indigenous peoples in terms of *adaptation to* or *assimilation into* a modernising society. Critical theory offers tools to investigate how “embeddedness” and “disembeddedness” explain the two options and hence to some extent how they can be determinant for the future of the ethnic minority groups. The new economic landscape in the South East Asian region is seen in light of this dichotomy.

The second part presents of the main dimensions of liberation and empowerment theories followed by a general critique that can be addressed at both. Their applicability is subsequently discussed in relation to the Lao PDR and Thailand in light of the social challenges facing the Mekong Region.

The last part discusses ideas and tools from the grounded theory as it challenges both the concept and use of theories. The grounded theory that is predominantly a methodological approach draws attention to the question of whether Western originated theories are at all applicable in investigating phenomena that pertain to indigenous population groups.

### 6.1. Disembedding Communities and Development – an Anthropological Approach

The indignation caused by an unjust world characterized by human suffering in terms of hunger, ethnic conflicts, and ecological crises just to mention a few, forces analysts of the rich

countries to critically look at our own moral habitus as well as to admit our own inadequacy in finding appropriate alternative theoretical approaches to redress these problems.

However, among development theories, some tools from the critical theory offer a framework within which one can ask pertinent questions. Modern critical theory is influenced by sociological and philosophical thought stemming from romanticism, utopianism and pragmatism of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The multiple theoretical orientations that critical theory has embraced have lead to a conceptualisation based on its most distinct analytical emblems: e.g. class, alienation, domination and imperialism (de Sousa Santos in Munck & O'Hearn 1999:32). Thus the critical theory's claim to be *for* someone: the underprivileged, seems straight- forward. One has already chosen sides, and in this study it is *for* the powerless ethnic groups. However, some critical theorists question the legitimacy and relevance of this discussion as other unresolved issues are more down-to-earth and not so much related to the construction of a common and "pure" critical theory. What is needed is an analytical structure that is compatible with other approaches regarding questions of how to perceive the configuration of a society, ways to understand the concept of emancipation, and which principles should be applied for transforming the society to eradicate domination and oppression<sup>198</sup>. Critical theory consequently contains a normative and utopian element in favour of a transformation of the social and political order. It is a guide for strategic action to advance human emancipation (Cox in Baylis & Smith 2001:236).

In this respect the work of Karl Polanyi adds to the theoretical foundation of critical theory, and makes a significant contribution to the development discussion. His ideas of the human condition in periods of economic transformations offer a useful framework that can be "...interpreted as a paradigm for a *post-Marxist* [italicss in the original] critical theory that is oriented to a multi-cultural world, not to societies that must rebuild themselves in the image of Western modernity" (Schroyer in Mendell and Salée 1991:66). Polanyi's critique against a narrow economic understanding of the complexity of society and the overriding market mentality is that it makes it impossible to understand other socio-cultural worlds than the Western. The way Polanyi interprets pre-capitalist, i.e. indigenous communities has been described as "economic anthropology". This approach is in contrast to the modernisation

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<sup>197</sup> Among the most significant goals are strategies to achieve: good governance, democracy, eradication of illiteracy and poverty reduction.

<sup>198</sup> De Sousa Santos argues that domination and oppression, that are inherently male traits, have been totally neglected by the modern critical theorists, and he is not surprised that "the last couple of decades feminist sociology has produced the best critical theory" (in Munck & O'Hearn 1999 p.34)

school in development studies who focuses on traditional societies as counterposed to modernity.

To understand what this entails his concepts of “embeddedness”, “reciprocity” and “disembeddedness” need explanation. In pre-capitalist societies the economic relations between members of the community are embedded in complex social relations in the sense that social ties, institutions and the specific cultural traits are a precondition for any market relations, and not the other way around. This is linked to the notion of social behaviour built around the conceptualisation of reciprocity, understood as “...obligatory and reciprocal gift-giving between persons who stand in some specific relationship with each other” (Routledge Encyclopedia of International Political Economy 2001:1219). In a modern understanding this seems as simple barter systems, but in indigenous societies the reciprocal gift-giving is an essential part of the cultural values, and not encumbered with any concern for profit. On the contrary, the pre-capitalist economy, as Polanyi sees it, serves only one purpose: its usefulness to the human being.

Thus Polanyi’s perception seems to be in congruence with Aristotle and Kant who plead for the “ethos of development” i.e. economy in the service of the usefulness to mankind, the sense of economic exchange as a necessary element for upholding the indigenous community<sup>199</sup>. Embedded education, the organic nature of indigenous education, is a prerequisite for the survival and evolution of indigenous communities. Their “womb-to-tomb” practices and concepts are internally originated processes that regulate the individual and collective behaviour, teach skills relevant to the community, and thereby build the capabilities and self-esteem of the individual. In other words it is the essence of human development.

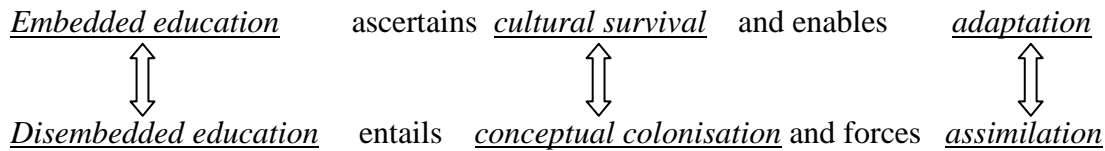
Opposed to this understanding is the economic rationality in the context of modern or modernising society of both liberal and socialist persuasion. In these societies the use-value of economy is replaced by profit and exchange-value, in Polanyi’s terminology a disembedded economy. Parallel to this economic disembeddedness is Sen’s concept of the indirect value of education in the service of industrialised production. Polanyi regards this as disembedded education. The disembeddedness consists in the fact that the education programmes are externally imposed and linked to a techno-economic development.

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<sup>199</sup> Another expression for the reciprocal exchange is “moral economy” (Ivan Illich in Schroyer in Mendell & Salée 1991 p.70, and John Friedmann 1992 p.15-16)

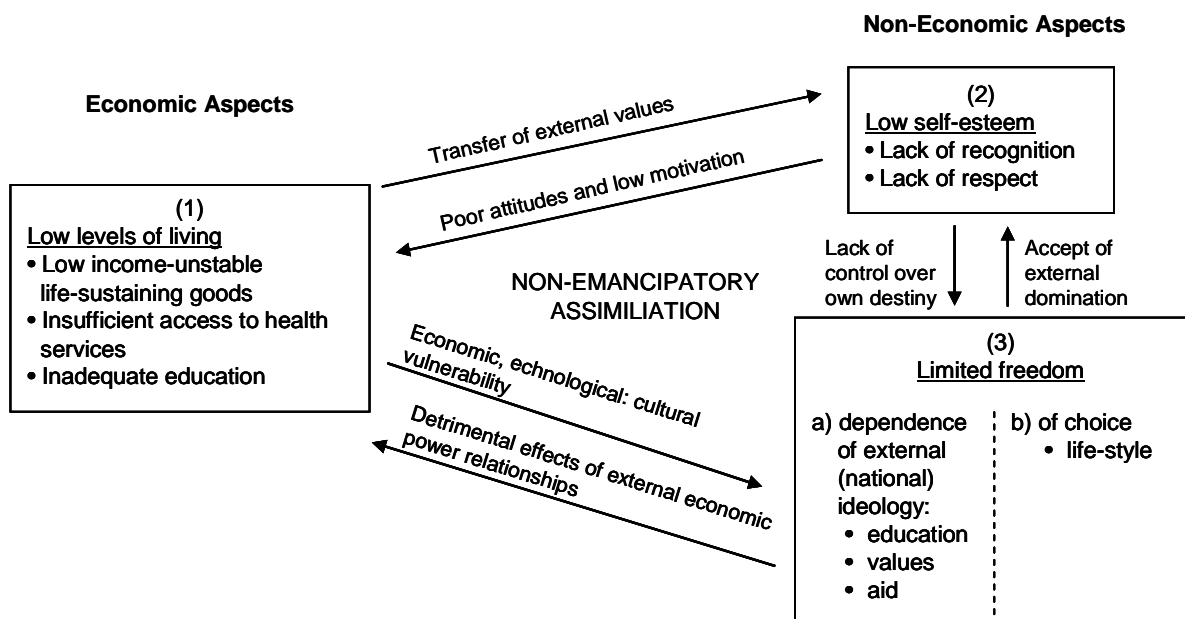


The sketch below briefly delineates the analysis developed above, concerning Polanyi's concept of respectively embeddedness and disembeddedness in relation to education and their consequences for indigenous peoples:



The dichotomy between adaptation and assimilation to a modernising society for ethnic minority groups can be viewed from respectively a humanistic or an economic point of view.

Although Todaro's tripod, multidimensional schematic framework of underdevelopment does not address the question of ethnicity, the non-emancipation can illustrate situation of the ethnic minority groups (Inspired by Todaro 1982 p.100)



The three boxes are mutually re-enforcing, but box (2) and (3) are strongly influenced by the low level of living, box (1). In principle there is nothing inherent in low levels of living to cause low self-esteem, unless people's worth in their own and other people's eyes is "... largely determined by their material well-being" (Todaro 1982:99). Thus the lack of emancipation for indigenous peoples as materially poor can be explained from an economic point of view, and the present socio-economic transformation in the South East Asian region leaves little room for adaptation of indigenous peoples to a modernizing society and a re-embeddedness in their interdependent social relations.

But in the context of indigenous development a basic element that has to be kept in mind is the “push and pull” treatment these communities are subjected to by the dominant modernizing groups on the national level, and which leads to misunderstanding as well as resistance.

#### **6.1.1. Re-embeddedness of Indigenous Communities in the Lao and Thai Cases**

In the economic transformative process in South East Asia the differences between the Lao PDR and Thailand seem obvious. Geo-politically, Thailand’s size and demographic composition as a predominantly ethnically homogenous society, gives it a special position in the region (although the idea of a nation state was adopted from Europe only a century ago<sup>200</sup>). The capitalist kingdom has become a multi-party democracy<sup>201</sup>. In contrast, in the small Lao PDR the socialist government rules its heterogeneous population with a firm hand. The Lao Government claims to be democratic, and criticism is allowed with certain restrictions as long as it is not directly opposing the government policy.

In UN socio-economic terms Thailand belongs to a moderately developed country, and on the Human Development Index it is listed as number 66 out of 162 countries, whereas the Lao PDR is indicated as number 131, and thus still belongs to the Least Developed Countries<sup>202</sup>.

There are, however, similarities between the countries that have significance for human development and education, especially for marginalised groups. While Thailand has never been colonised it can be claimed that the USA has been a key external factor in the economic development of the country. The “marriage of business and politics” started in the late 1950s when Thailand was encouraged to adopt a free-world model of development (Phongpaichit & Baker 1998:21). Grants and loans from the US is still one of the driving forces behind Thailand’s economic boom. In the case of the Lao PDR, the country has had a long history of outside intervention as it has been colonised by France, Vietnam, Thailand, the United States of America (during the Second Indochina War), while the present dependency of foreign aid entails a more subtle and opaque form of colonisation.

Both countries have ambitions: Thailand seeks to retain its position as the Fifth Economic Tiger, and the Lao PDR wants to use its carrefour-position to develop into an indispensable

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<sup>200</sup> Phongpaichit & Baker 1998 p.220

<sup>201</sup> At present the democracy seems to be in a critical state. The prime minister, Thaksin promised new policies when he came to power in 2001. He promised “...vibrant news media, strong civil society, more public participation and wide-ranging reforms... but he abused critics, violated human rights and disdained democracy and the rule of law” (Phongpaichit & Baker in the New York Times 14. April 2006)

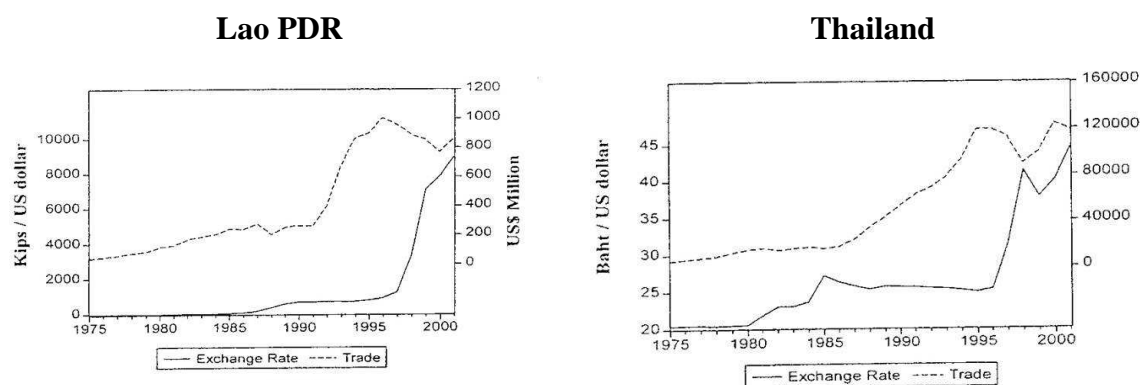
<sup>202</sup> The Economist 2001 in Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003 p.442

hub in the region. Foreign actors thus play a significant role in both countries. In Thailand the business community "... is totally dominated by the immigrant Chinese" (Ibid p.10), and China together with Thailand, have also economically colonised the Lao PDR during the last decade in terms of construction of hotels and businesses, banks and manufacturing enterprises<sup>203</sup>.

The reasons behind the uneven development processes in both Thailand and the Lao PDR in favour of the core populations in the urban and metropolitan areas are to be found not only in differences in climate, resource endowments and accessibility. As Parnwell & Arghiros point out: "It also involves historical, socio-cultural, economic and political explanations" (Parnwell & Arghiros 1996:3). In this context it will suffice to mention a few examples. Despite the Thai government's decentralisation policy "...virtually all Japanese investments in Thailand are located in the Bangkok metropolis" (Ibid.,p.11). In the Lao PDR the government disposes of a poverty reduction fund of 18,4 billion kip<sup>204</sup> to be used until 2020, but "Ce programme porte essentiellement sur le développement de la capitale, afin de la transformer en un vrai carrefour économique et socioculturel, tant sur le plan national que sur le plan international" (Le Rénovateur 30.August 2005).

The figures below are schematic outlines of foreign investments in the Lao PDR and Thailand from 1975-2001. (Kosa-ard & Dore: 2003, p. 444)

**Figure 5: FDI in Lao PDR and Thailand**



The human development policies in both Thailand and the Lao PDR are tailored to fit the growing industrialisation process. The dilemmas in this process are especially complex in the Lao PDR. The country strives for economic survival by adopting a quasi-liberal market

<sup>203</sup> In 2005 there were 1803 enterprises in Vientiane (Le Rénovateur 30 August 2005)

<sup>204</sup> Approximately 200 million US\$.

economy, as well as struggling to keep the ideological control over a multi-cultural population. In the midst of this turbulent period the indigenous peoples in the Lao PDR are fighting for cultural survival.

The growing industrial sector is in need of two kinds of labour force. The techno-intensive industry will attract skilled people who are mainly found in urban areas, and the labour-intensive enterprises will recruit people who are un-skilled in modern technology. The latter enterprises will also absorb indigenous peoples who will be underpaid in 3-D jobs<sup>205</sup>, and once their labour is no longer needed they are likely to be dismissed. Their temporary inclusion in a disembedded market economy has alienated them from their traditional community. They remain non-emancipated and disempowered in a process that has not made it easier for the indigenous peoples to adapt to a modern society.

In a certain sense the condition in which the indigenous peoples find themselves exemplifies the dilemma which modernisation theory overlooks in its promotion of a process whereby a traditional society has to be replaced by modernity. With the help of Polanyi's critique of disembeddedness we are made aware of the fact that the establishment of a market economy is not a natural law, but the result of political choice and decision that has violent consequences also in the development of capitalism in the so-called developed society. Consequently, this theoretical dichotomy may be summarised in the following way: while modernisation theory conceptualises traditional society as an obstacle to capitalist industrial development, economic anthropology (Polanyi) sees the market economy as a hindrance to human development.

## **6.2. Disempowered People – a Human Rights Approach**

The recognition of the complexity in analysing the development process in Third World countries makes critical theory mutually intelligible with liberation theory as both share a clear “pro-someone ideology”, as well as they both deny being pure and complete theories. Indigenous peoples live in a state of “unfreedom” in terms of economical marginalisation and lack of influence on the development process that affect their lives.

### **6.2.1. Liberation Theory**

The Brazilian educator, Pablo Freire's analysis concerning emancipation of the dominated classes does not only contain an economic connotation, but his definition of the so-called

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<sup>205</sup> 3-D jobs refer to dirty, dangerous and demeaning.

“banking education” can be compared to Polanyi’s concept of “disembedded education”. A short historical flashback will corroborate the connection. The 1960s and 1970s were turbulent years in Brazil, as well as in the rest of the world. The decade of the 1970s became the heydays of a blooming political debate climate, where educators drew nourishment from Freire’s revolutionary pedagogical thoughts. His inspiration from Marx’s conceptualisation of the power relations in society was strengthened when he worked with miners and farm workers in Brazil. In this reality he experienced the lack of neutrality and the political, oppressive nature of education thought out and practiced by the ruling classes. Freire’s theory of learning is grounded in the claim that “*the whole activity of education is political in nature*” [italics in the original] (McLaren & Leonard 2000:27).

In banking education narration is fundamental. The teacher is the narrator whose task is “...to “fill” the students with the contents of his narration” (Freire 1993:52). The teachers are the knowledgeable and the learners are considered as empty. The learners are “receptables”, who memorise the words of the teacher, and the content of the narratives is detached from reality. The words are deprived of their significance in the concrete world have no transformative character, and the learners are alienated by the verbosity of hollow words. Banking education is pacifying and obviates thinking. Any creative power inherent in the learner is curbed thus serving the interest of the oppressor. Even a well-intentioned teacher might not be aware of her/his domesticating role, while s/he promotes the reactionary nature of this kind of education. According to Freire banking education is dehumanising as it prevents people from realising that the domesticator seeks to maintain them in a state in which they are objects alienated from their own decision-making, and not subjects with the potential of transforming their own lives.

The overriding theme in a “Talking Book” i.e. a written dialogue between Ira Shor and Pablo Freire is how liberating education relates to political transformation of society. The discussion gives a good insight in the nature of banking education. Shor explains the difference in epistemology between banking education and other forms of learning through a new concept: the gnosiological cycle, which means “...the distinct moments in the way we learn” (Shor & Freire 1987:7). There are two dialectically related moments in this cycle: “the production of new knowledge”, and the other moment is the one “...in which you know the existing knowledge” (Ibid.,p.8). The dichotomy becomes obvious when we realise that knowledge is produced far away from the learners by official curriculum developers and textbook writers mirroring the prevailing political ideology (cf. “disembedded education”). The learners are then asked to repeat the lesson. As a consequence, the act of *knowing* the existing knowledge is

reduced to a simple *transference* of the existing knowledge (Ibid.,p.8). Thus banking education is deprived of the most essential quality in the production of knowledge e.g. uncertainty, critical reflection and action for change.

Contrary to this approach, a critical pedagogy through which people are considered to be subjects, also in their own understanding, and no longer objects, necessitates an understanding of the difference between naïve consciousness and critical consciousness. In Freire's thinking "... the role of man was not only to be in the world, but to engage in relation with the world" (Freire 1973:43); An individual whose consciousness is naïve is a spectator, and not a re-creator (Freire 1993:56). Naïve consciousness accepts reality and causality as indisputable and non-dynamic facts. If consciousness is isolated from the world, the individual is denying its "...ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human" (Ibid.,p.65). A critical consciousness is to be interpreted as an integrated part of reality, which is seen as a process, and therefore leading to critical action. The means to move people from naïve to critical consciousness is through an "...active, *dialogical* and criticism-stimulating *method*" as well as a change in "...the *program content* of education" [italics in the original]<sup>206</sup> (Freire 1973:44-55). Freire terms this as "problem-posing education", because the learners become aware of their incompleteness and hence the necessity to act as creators of their own future evolution via the dynamics of dialogues and critical thinking. Problem-posing education is a humanist and liberating act that "...posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation" (Freire 1993:67)

#### 6.2.1.1. Difficulties in the Application of the Liberation Theory

The quest for emancipation of oppressed groups is of more relevance now than ever. The revival of the education discussion of critical pedagogy from the 1970s as crucial for the development of human potential applies to both the developed and developing world. The neo-liberal agenda has left its mark on the pedagogical debate. The visions for education are imbued with narrow demands of qualifications, competence building and competition mentality. According to Jan Hoby the education system is under massive attack from big international institutions such as OECD and WTO<sup>207</sup>. Through legislation and agreements they push governments to standardise and adapt education systems to the neo-liberal agenda all over

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<sup>206</sup> In his book "Education for Critical Consciousness" Freire enumerates a list of practical interactions between learner, teacher and nature to illustrate the process.

<sup>207</sup> Thailand was a founding member in 1995, and the Lao PDR became formal WTO observer in 2001 (Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003 p.3)

the world. Thus the countries' curricula are a direct result of this interference, and it is difficult to disagree with Hoby who finds it to be an unjust system, that dehumanises oppressed groups in any society.<sup>208</sup>

The irony in this emancipation process is especially interesting where the Lao PDR is concerned. Freire's socialist, critical pedagogy emerged in an ideological clash with the capitalist ruling classes. In Freire's terms: "The problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity" (Freire 1993:65). The ruling classes in the Lao PDR are encapsulated in the socialist, revolutionary party and government, and there are no signs that this will change in the future. The dichotomy thus lies in the double quest for emancipation: in principle the socialist government should opt for the Freireian model, but at the same time the regime introduced economic oppression of the neo-liberal market conditions in the hope that this is the means to leave the non-emancipatory status.

An often-ventured critique of liberation theory is that it is utopian. It is accused of being too optimistic in its belief that education can serve as the main agent of change in a development process. According to Fägerlind & Saha there is very little evidence that liberation theory, related to education, has had any significant impact on the development process in developing countries (Fägerlind & Saha 1989:26-27). In the Lao PDR and Thailand the focus on economism as the prevailing development indicator substantiates this analysis. Both countries are under international pressure, and despite their ideological and demographic differences (as well as the Lao PDR is economically dependant on foreign development aid), they both yield to a standardisation of education determined by market forces, an external "disembedded education", that only appeals to a certain segment of the population.

Another objection against the theory is that critical-consciousness-education "...can be used to serve any political position" (Ibid.,p.27). As a consequence, liberation for some can mean repression of others, depending on the power relations in the particular country. Dealing with societies divided by classes and ethnicities, it is quite clear that all at the same time will not see an emancipation process as positive.

From a human rights perspective both the Thai and Lao governments are repressive as far as education for marginalised groups is concerned. In this context, at least two questions could be

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<sup>208</sup> Jan Hoby: "Paulo Freires socialistiske ideer for et andet uddannelsessystem" [Paulo Freire's socialist ideas of

asked: Is there political will to allocate more funds to change the institutional framework for the education sector at all administrative levels, and find resources to educate teachers for critical education? The economic situation and the demographic heterogeneity in the case of the Lao PDR make this question even more complex.

Another controversial assumption is that the replacement of a domesticating education policy in favour of a liberating education philosophy would pose a threat to the power of the government. Again this shows the particular paradox of the socialist Lao PDR. In the government's optic it seems more fatal to transfer more power to the people in terms of increased participation than to abide by the genuine socialist, revolutionary principles of power equalisation.

### **6.2.2. Empowerment Theory**

The 1993 Human Development Report states that “Development must be woven around people, not people around development – and it should empower individuals and groups rather than disempower them” (UNDP 1993:1). After the decade of default in repayment and the well-documented shortcomings of the World Bank and IMF-imposed structural adjustment programmes, the search for an alternative development began. As the mainstream models of development failed to grasp the nettle where poverty and sustainability were concerned, a humanist model of development ripened in order to replace the mainstream economic growth paradigms. Old and new development theorists and practitioners established the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA). The purpose was to pay more attention to the “Third System Project” in relation to the state and the market which are considered as the two principal sources of powers in a society. The IFDA document on the building blocks for an alternative development states:

But people have an autonomous power, legitimately theirs. The ‘third system’ is that part of the people which is reaching a critical consciousness of their role”. It is not a party or an organization; it constitutes a movement of those, free associations, citizens and militants, who perceive that the essence of history is the endless struggle by which people try to master their own destiny – the process of humanization of man.

(IFDA 1980: 69)



Thus the state and the market should no longer be the main actors in the development process. John Friedmann was one of the first theorists to assign the third system, the civil society, an important role in the process, but contrary to many others he still considered the state a major player. He maintains that: “It [the state] may need to be made more accountable to poor people and more responsive to their claims. But without the state’s collaboration, the lot of the poor cannot be significantly improved. Local empowering action requires a strong state” (Friedmann 1992:7). Redefined and balanced roles between the state, the civil society and the corporate economy would be the means to overcome the systematic disempowerment of excluded people (Ibid.,p.30-31). The household is the central domain of empowerment in the alternative development philosophy, and the social, political and psychological power are the three dimensions in which the household ideally could change their livelihood.

The list below is a shortened version of what Friedmann considers to be the main constituents of social power:

1. *Defensible life space*. The territorial base of the household economy. It extends beyond the space called “home”. It encompasses the immediate, friendly and supportive neighbourhood where socialising and other life-supporting activities are conducted.
2. *Surplus time*. This is the time available to the household economy apart from the time spent on upholding life. Without access to surplus time, options for the households are rigorously constrained.
3. *Knowledge and Skills*. This refers to both the educational levels and mastery of specific skills, at least for some members of the household.
4. *Appropriate Information*. By this is meant reasonably accurate information that makes the household able to gain awareness about health and sanitation matters as well as access to public services. Without this information the skills become useless as a means to self-development.
5. *Social Organisation*. This refers to formal and informal organisations to which households may belong, because organisations act as a source of information.
6. *Social Networks*. These are essential for self-reliant actions based on reciprocity. There are horizontal (family, friends and neighbours) and vertical networks (upwards in the social hierarchy). In a positive form, the latter can give households access other forms of power.
7. *Instruments of Work and Livelihood*. This refers to the tools necessary for the household to sustain their life: physical strength, access to water and productive land. They also include the tools used in the household’s informal work and in the domestic sphere itself.
8. *Financial Resources*. These include the net monetary income of the household and credit arrangements.

(Friedmann 1992, p.67-69)

To Friedmann the different and yet interdependent social power constituents are the stimuli that cause the improvement in the following dimensions of power.

The second constituent, the political power, first and foremost concerns the participation of individual household members in decisions that affect their own lives and development. With the social power as a precondition, the political power then gives people confidence to voice their opinions where collective action is necessary as well as in any kind of assembly, social movement or interest group (Friedmann 1992:33).

The last constituent, the psychological power can best be described as “an individual sense of potency” (Ibid.,p.33). A self-confident behaviour will most often be a result of strengthened social and political empowerment, and it will have a positive effect on the household’s struggle to enhance the social and political power<sup>209</sup>.

Thus the concept of empowerment in the development discourse was especially associated with the need for building the capacities of the third system promotion. In more generic terms empowerment means strengthening people’s ability to understand the world around them in terms of inclusion in any development regarding their lives, enhancing transparency in the process and the claim for accountability towards the immediate beneficiaries. In their interpretation of empowerment Singh and Titi are more explicit where indigenous peoples are concerned by stating that it should encompass: “Provision of space for cultural assertion and spiritual welfare, and experiential social learning, including the accumulation and application of indigenous knowledge, in addition to theoretical/scientific knowledge” (Singh & Titi 1995:13), although the last part of the sentence reveals a rather imperialist attitude by referring to indigenous knowledge as non-scientific.

#### **6.2.2.1. Critique of Empowerment Theory**

The theory can be criticised both at the discursive and the operational level. Parpart, Rai & Staudt critically examine empowerment theory, as well as presenting ways of re-discovering the original meaning behind the rhetoric. At the outset empowerment theory was associated with alternative approaches to development to foster social transformation, and it is easy to accept its

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<sup>209</sup> In Peter Oakley’s definition of empowerment there are 6 dimensions: the psychological, cultural (encompassing a redefinition of gender rules, practices and norms), social, economic, organisational and political dimensions (Oakley 2001:23). Nelly Strömquist divides the dimensions in four equally important but not in themselves sufficient dimensions: the cognitive dimension (critical understanding of one’s reality), the psychological (feeling of self-esteem), the political (awareness of power

potential aim. In the 1990s it became the “motherhood” term (Parpart et al. 2002:3) and it was adopted by the mainstream development organisations as well as by the smallest NGOs. Parpart et al. ask therefore “Why is empowerment acceptable to such disparate bedfellows?” (Ibid.,p.3) Its focus on the local level, and the initial seduction by its potential pose the danger that one becomes too romantic about inclusion of marginalised people.

The authors pinpoint major shortcomings in the popular interpretation of empowerment. First, empowerment is not sufficiently analysed at the global and national levels. At a global level economic, political and cultural mechanisms contribute to expanding the power of some while further marginalising others. Before these macro-relations are properly examined it is difficult to endow empowerment theory with credibility. However, Friedmann claims that it is not enough to act locally: “Alternative development requires a translocal politics” (Friedmann 1992:84), but while acknowledging the realities of an increasingly interconnected world and interdependent economy, he does not examine alternative development in a global dimension. Gerardo Munck supports this critique when claiming that Friedmann neglects the fact that “A theory of alternative development must give greater attention to the working of the global economy, the link between local and global economics, and the interaction of international networks” (Gerardo Munck 1992:180)

Second, Parpart et al. draw upon Foucault’s concept of the nature of power, in their claim that “...empowerment cannot transcend power relations” (Parpart et al.2002 p.4). It is not taken into account that the power structures at any level in a given society prevent empowerment to be an applicable theory in a social transformation process.

A third reason for rethinking the theory is the lack of analyses concerning the fact that individual empowerment at the micro-level necessitates institutional support at the meso(national)-level. Munck endorses this critique as he draws attention to the strategies linked to the theory. A central element that Friedmann has not taken into account is the indispensable linkage between the grassroot level organisations and political parties. Furthermore, although empowerment theory and other proponents of alternative development approaches recognise the state as an “unavoidable actor”, very little is said about the interaction between the levels that renders establishment of a proper institutional framework impossible. Friedmann virtually ignores the particular institutional forms that would allow for bottom-up empowerment to take

place (Munck 1992:179)<sup>210</sup>. Without institutional affiliation replicability of successful projects are made impossible.

The last reflection Parpart et al. deal with, is the question of how to measure whether empowerment has taken place and how to measure the outcomes. It might be the biggest merit of the empowerment theory that it must be considered both as a process and a goal in itself. (Ibid.p.4), but the demand for tangible results adds to the uncertainty of its validity.

Another uncertainty concerning empowerment is the assumption that people will participate in the process. Although it seems the most logical behaviour, people will participate only if they decide to. Both theorists and practitioners may end up disillusioned, because: “After all, no one can empower anyone” (Sefa Dei in Singh & Titi 1995:148). Alternative development and its characteristics: liberation, conscientisation, participation and empowerment represent a well-meaning and ethical choice, but as it is externally imposed, it might be as alien to the beneficiaries as other development approaches, and hence it becomes difficult to distinguish from the traits of mainstream philosophy and practice.

It has partly been recognised that the conventional development approaches are incompatible with a changed world, and the empowerment theory has been proclaimed to be the definitive approach whose tools are able to reach any kind of marginalised groups of anywhere in the developing world. Parpart et al. express this point very clearly: “Participatory empowerment approaches to development have become a mantra, promising solutions to the intensifying poverty and disempowerment in the South and to some extent in the North” (Parpart in Parpart et al. 2002:166). The dangers in this are that it generates expectations that might not be fulfilled thus weakening the approach itself.

Despite the good intentions inherent in empowerment theory the above discussion entitles critics to assume that not all empowerment approaches can or perhaps even intend to seriously transform the power relations and structures in a society.

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in Parpart et al. 2002 p.14)

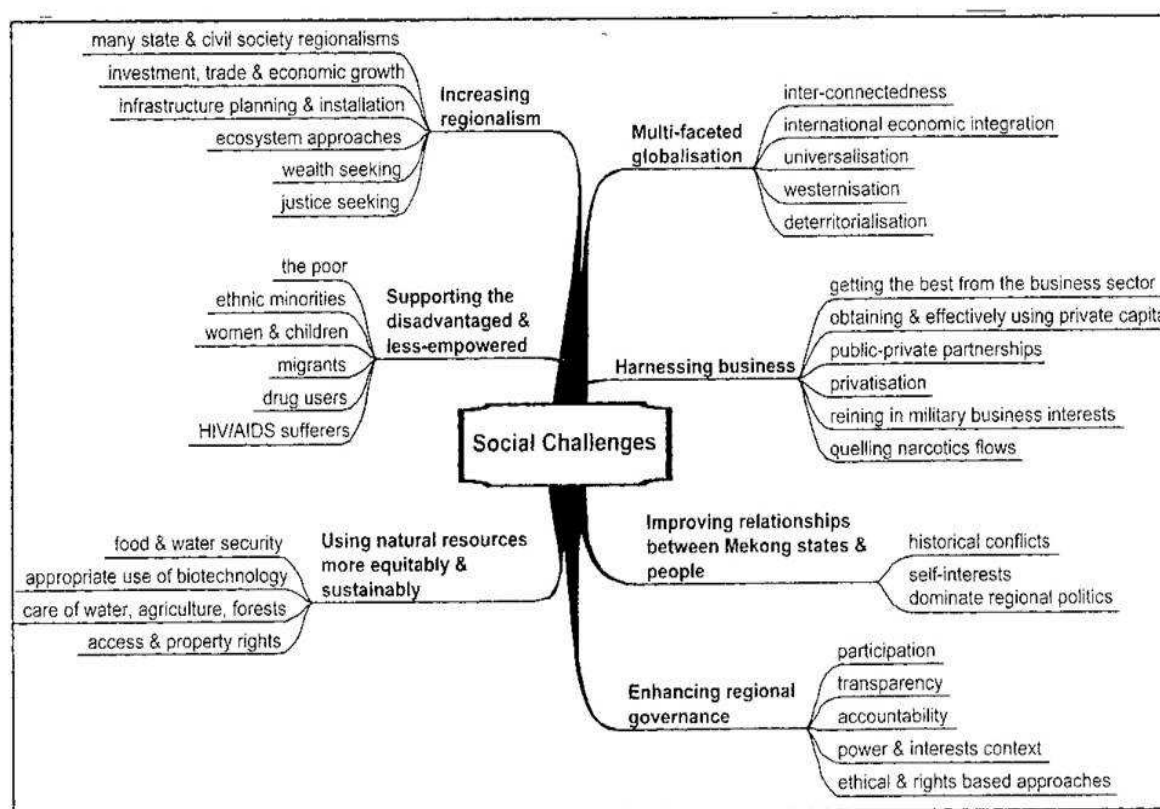
<sup>210</sup> It could be argued that Friedmann has left spaces in his theory to allow for adaptability in various practical contexts.

### 6.2.3. Theoretical Void and Development in the Lao PDR and Thailand

From a human rights perspective liberation and empowerment theories seem applicable, but why should these social and more contextualising theories substitute Western economic development theories when explaining the development process and priorities in the Lao PDR and Thailand? As the aim for the Lao PDR is “to quit once and for all the status of a least developed country by the year 2020” (Cf. chapter 1), and the vision for Thailand to become “a fully developed country by the year 2020”<sup>211</sup>, it is questionable whether the Lao and Thai governments think they can afford to pay attention to any kind of minorities. Especially for the heterogeneous Lao PDR this might seem a legitimate standpoint. From a humanistic value judgement uneven development can be deemed socially immoral, but from an economic point of view it might even be desirable. (Parnwell & Arghiros in Parnwell: 1996p.2-3).

Despite the differences between countries in the Mekong Region they can no longer be seen in isolation. The development challenges they face have regional and transborder dimensions. The sketch below is an overview of the current development issues facing the region.

**Figure 6: Social Challenges for the Mekong Region:**



(Kosa-ard & Dore: 2003, p. 2)

<sup>211</sup> Thai Government Policies and Support Programmes. (Retrieved from [www.fao.org/docrep/004/ac383e05.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/ac383e05.htm) 14th March 2006)

Each of the groupings in the sketch above contains at least one issue that affects the situation of indigenous peoples, and one of the major challenges is how the countries can protect their less empowered people. However, “Human rights debates in the region are often stymied by elites’ resistance to considering alternative views” (Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003:5).

The disembedded economy is the overriding factor in the development process. The increasing regionalism and economic integration demand greater investment, employment, trade, business profits and general economic growth as the priorities, and all countries in the Mekong Region need massive injection of capital to fulfil their ambitions. The governments are increasingly reliant on private capital to finance their development agendas. There is, however, no guarantee that the business sector will provide more social equality. Private investors, public-private partnerships and other financial arrangements are burgeoning with lack of transparency as one of the consequences. The new techniques as true followers of the rapid spread of capitalist values in the region do not take account of “...societal ethics and humane quality of life” (Theeravit in Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003:68). All countries in the Mekong Region are outward oriented in their eagerness to keep step with the development pace, and the alienation of peripheral population groups is widening as “...there exist an atmosphere of global development without community development” (Ibid., p.68).

The military is another significant, economic player in the region’s economic landscape that contribute to the unevenness, and whose financial transactions are rather impenetrable. Their business interests cover harvesting and selling of natural resources, and the armies in the countries “...have a business life of their own, quite apart from their national security role” (Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003:9). The profit from narcotics<sup>212</sup> is said to add to the armies’ wealth as well as it is becoming a part of the more formal economy in many countries of the region.

The aid business with the IMF, World Bank and AsDB as the most momentous lending and donor agencies are controlled by the capitalist West and Japan. The conditions attached to the loans and grants are most often claimed to be in the interest of the recipient countries. However, considering the lack of development space for marginalised people, the motives behind this substantial foreign aid is often badly disguised Western neo-liberal imperialism,

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<sup>212</sup> On 14<sup>th</sup> February 2006 the Lao PDR declared itself an opium-producing-free country which cannot be seen as exclusively positive for indigenous peoples who depend on opium cultivation as a supplement to their livelihood. The ban on opium growing has not been followed up by proper crop substitution possibilities and general community development activities.

and foreign aid is by some political scientists regarded as a Trojan Horse (Theeravit in Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003:69).

The intrinsic ambiguity in the empowerment theory itself affects its credibility. At a more operational level, the global economy as the prime determinant of the development priorities in the Mekong Region leave liberation and empowerment theories with limited authority to explore the possibility for social change.

The general critique of empowerment theory mentioned above is applicable to the cases of both the Lao PDR and Thailand. Notwithstanding differences between the socialist and the capitalist country, power and politics are enmeshed and concentrated among the elites. Nothing seems able to threaten the historical authority attributed to leaders and cadres at the different administrative levels in the Lao PDR. In Thailand the social culture of superior-subordinate relationship also continues to shape the political culture. This relationship is often related to patron-client ties, and parallel to the situation in the Lao PDR the power of central and local elites in peripheral areas perpetuate the unequal balance of power. This state of affairs can be expressed as follows: "Consciousness of power on the part of the bureaucratic elite accompanied by consciousness of lack of power by the rest were the twins norms of Thai politics" (Girling cited in Parnwell 1996:12).

As local NGOs are not allowed in the Lao PDR, the theoretical discussion concerning the claim of the third system as the catalyst to empower the disempowered seems almost superfluous<sup>213</sup>. According to the empowerment theory a strong state is a prerequisite for a thriving civil society, but the Lao PDR can only be considered as powerful in terms of an articulate political ideology and its persistent use of the state apparatus. As for foreign NGOs they are often institutional orphans (as in many other developing countries), and in the Lao PDR these NGOs are welcomed but controlled.

Thailand's advantages in terms of a stronger economy, better infrastructure and a relatively greater political room for manoeuvre for both local and foreign NGOs could in principle make

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<sup>213</sup> Now, in Laos, there are a number of "development/professional" organizations emerging that hope to avail of donor funding as "local NGOs" but the GOL seems to be trying out the idea and waiting to see where it will lead. A pioneer in this endeavour is Mr.Sombat Somphone, Director of PADETC, the Participatory Development Education Training Center. It is not strictly speaking, an NGO. But it is close to it. He gets funding from a number of donors. He was presented with the Magsaysay Award for outstanding work in community development this past year. (Interview with Mr. Arthur Chrisfield September 2005)

the national human development policies receptive to the strategies and methods of both empowerment and liberation theories. Many of the Thai NGOs with the most fruitful impact and participatory approaches are organisations with indigenous peoples involved. However, the governments' control and lack of support to innovative thinkers at various levels render the demand for enhanced social, political and psychological power and a consciousness raising education impossible.

In principle liberation and empowerment theories and their emancipatory tools should benefit disempowered groups. However, the ideas of how to empower and to liberate do not seem to pave the way for development and adaptation of the indigenous peoples in the Mekong Region. Hence it is necessary to look for a theoretical framework that is more compatible to indigenous worldviews. Escobar pleads for "...more endogenous discourses" (Escobar 1992:431), and Schmidt claims that: "There is a strong need for indigenisation of development theory based either on Third World nationalism or on regionalism and a recognition of the fact that development may follow many diverse paths and polycentric directions " (Schmidt in Dixon & Smith 1997:25). However true that is, the terms above "endogenous" and "indigenisation" could be interpreted as synonymous with "Third World" as such. What must be taken into account, however, are the heterogeneity and the internal imperialism in many Third World countries against excluded minority groups.

### **6.3. Are Established Theories Compatible with Indigenous Worldviews?**

Indigenous peoples's own worldviews and concepts are rarely deemed valid, legitimate features in development theories. On the contrary, indigenous peoples have felt oppressed by theories. Thus some questions need clarification: (1) Why do established theories fail to fully explain the situation of indigenous peoples? (2) How do ideas and tools from grounded theory offer help in re-visiting the concept of 'theory'?

(1) Parallel to externally conceived methodologies most theories can be said to display a conceptual and cultural arrogance, as they operate with a range of fragmented concepts that in all probability are alien to indigenous peoples. Theories tend to atomize modes of explanation into more or less measurable units such as e.g. economic, institutional or rights related variables, which are incompatible with the embedded worldview of indigenous peoples. These theories are contributing to make the indigenous world "...fragmented and dying" (Tuhiwai Smith 2004:28). However, indigenous peoples do not reject theories as: "It enables us to make sense of reality. It enables us to make assumptions and predictions about the world in which we live... Theories enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties" (Ibid.,p.38).



Nevertheless, according to Tuhiwai Smith what is needed are “...that new ways of theorizing by indigenous scholars are grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person” (Ibid.,p.38). In other words, it is doubtful whether established theories can grasp the importance of history, narratives and feeling of belonging as the glue that binds the constituents of the indigenous worldview. Theories have to be de-colonised, which leads to a discussion of the next question.

(2) For research that is exploratory in nature, as this study has been, the discovery of new findings could be seen through another lens in which the borders between theory, methodology and empirical evidence are fluid. To consider theories as entangled with more operational levels can make it more evident that: “...the ultimate justification of any theoretical enterprise is to render the world more understandable” (Layder 1993:15). Recognition of the indigenous peoples’s concepts therefore seems indispensable in order to find lines of attack to enable them to adapt to an industrialising society.

As sketched in chapter 4 a complementary option to the theoretical framework could be to develop a theory from the data collected and not to speculate about how data fit into established theories, be they mainstream or alternative. Compared to these theories the grounded theory seems a vaporous as well as an anarchic term as it is derived from “...data systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (Strauss & Corbin 1996:12). Thus in a manner of speaking the researcher collecting data do not have a clear idea of “...’where it’s going’ in theoretical terms”. (Layder 1993:129). This is basically speaking the procedure this study has consistently tried to follow.<sup>214</sup> However, it must be admitted that giving voice to the voiceless and attempting to convey their concepts, does not comply with the concept as a pure theory. Nevertheless, some of the ideas and tools seem appropriate.

The objective of grounded theory is to let the collected empirical data (hence the term ‘grounded’) constitute the pivotal point in a study. Is it then legitimate to talk of a ‘theory’ in the conventional sense? As the *raison d’être* of theories is to make the world understandable, and if indigenous peoples’s worldview and hence some of its inherent constituents such as education and human development are to be taken seriously, well-established theories might not be able to explain and predict development processes on behalf of these peoples. Theories tend to consider indigenous peoples from outside in the sense that they are studied as a certain segment of a population in a national, regional or international context, but still from an outsider’s point of view and not for their own sake. Furthermore, one could interpret the *raison*

d'être of the grounded theory as being an intellectual challenge to the way we normally define and apply theories. Moreover, it has bearings on development researchers' self-understanding. There is often competition or at least a lack of dialogue between "...those who call themselves 'theorists'... and those who deal with primary data collection (empirical researchers)" (Ibid., p.15)

The dissolution between theory and methodology as maintained by the proponents of grounded theory represent an academic liberation. Firstly, because the researcher is exempted from seeing the generation of theories "...as a sacrosanct activity reserved only for those who have been initiated into the mysteries of some 'master' framework or perspective" (Ibid.,p.53). Secondly, because it makes the researcher free in the same way, as does her/his attempt to adhere to reversals in learning. A schooled researcher is unfree "...if all fieldwork data is interpreted in terms of a prior framework" says Layder who further argues that "... in this kind of situation knowledge cannot progress since the data of research is always interpreted as reinforcing or verifying the existing perspective of the researcher" (Ibid.,p.52).<sup>215</sup>

Therefore the question is then not how to build a theory from the collected data, but rather who should build the theory? One should remember that in social science "... innovatory potential of knowledge and research will derive from the cross-fertilization of ideas from different frameworks" (Ibid.,p.53).<sup>216</sup> In that respect Layder seems in agreement with Tuhiwai Smith as she accepts theories as necessary but at the same time claims that they must be de-colonised (Tuhiwai Smith 2004:39). The semantics and methodologies of Western theories do not seem to be able to encompass a non-fragmented indigenous reality. The quest for "many diverse paths" in theorizing on Third World issues as argued by Tuhiwai Smith could then positively be interpreted as giving way to a framework that builds on the reality of indigenous peoples.

Education and human development are crucial constituents of the indigenous worldview, and the lack of recognition of their existence in theses communities as demonstrated in the field research has convinced me that it is time to break new grounds. It is time for the Western

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<sup>214</sup> It was a deliberate choice, though, for this study not to follow the fieldwork guidelines of the grounded theory. What I found appealing in the perspectives (chap.4) was the importance paid to the empirical data.

<sup>215</sup> The grounded theory can be said to have inherent obstacles. If the researcher before engaging in a study decides to use grounded theory as the only theoretical framework s/he will be bound by what Strauss & Corbin call "theoretical sampling". S/he thereby controls the process and it becomes difficult to "...keep the sampling systematic and consistent without rigidifying the process". (Strauss & Corbin 1998:201)

<sup>216</sup> Here Layder seems more open to draw on other research perspectives in connection with theory construction than Glaser and Strauss (Layder 1993:53-54)

researchers to realise that valuable insight be can be gained, if indigenous peoples are given the voice. Instead of researching and theorising *on* indigenous peoples, representatives from indigenous communities need to be involved in the design of their own future. Therefore one must agree with Tuhiwai Smith, an indigenous scholar herself, when she claims that indigenous peoples need to be involved in “... theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (Ibid.,p.39).

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has not been to establish an artificial dichotomy between formal education as bad, and indigenous education as good. One should be careful neither to romanticise the world of indigenous peoples nor to consider their life style as static and inflexible. The dichotomy consists in the different value systems behind the concept of education. Embedded learning in indigenous cultures relates to the survival, preservation and evolution of ethnic identity, whereas disembedded learning that relates to the acquisition of skills and lifestyles required by modernisation which weakens or destroys the indigenous society. The introduction of a culture of modernisation is based on promises of material improvement and individualism decreasing the commonalities inherent in indigenous communities. The tension between the two processes can increase, or co-existence be established. The objective of the dissertation has been to challenge the concept of validity with regard to indigenous education and concept of human development and through some indigenous peoples's own testimonies to establish indigenous education (knowledge) as legitimate sources of knowing and learning. The historical process of accumulating collective experience creates new knowledge and thereby makes indigenous knowledge dynamic, as well as helping them in the adaptation process.

The challenge at hand for development thinking and strategy is to take into consideration the tensions between the modernising practices and the indigenous responses. Ethnic minorities' dilemma is to adjust to externally imposed norms, patterns of living and culture, to accept inclusion in the modernisation process, while still preserving their identity. The field research showed a certain openness of Hmong and Akha groups towards the external and foreign world<sup>217</sup>. They seem to be in favour of transformation although reluctant towards radical disembeddedment of their culture and learning traditions that ensure their survival as indigenous peoples. They voice expectations for recognition of their identity. And contrary to some anti-development theorists and culturalists they are prone to be included and not excluded from modernisation as shown by several specialists and authorities (e.g. Rigg, Tuhiwai Smith and Sefa Dei).

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<sup>217</sup> Intellectuals from other minority groups expressed the same openness: "We tell them [the children] as human beings we should not stay in one place. We have to explore another world in order to develop ourselves" (Mr. Kittisak Ruttanakrajangsri at Round Table Meeting, December 2001, Chiang Mai, Thailand p.4 (See Appendix 3, Field Study 4)

Indigenous peoples whose learning systems are characterised by the absence of colonial imposition, have never felt the need to make their voice heard and their worldview recognised greater than now, when they are exposed to a post-colonial intrusion, enforced by ruling classes in the developing countries and outside actors. There is a growing awareness “...*that their [indigenous peoples’s] past and present experiences have been flooded out* [italics in the original] by the rise in influence of Western industrial capital” (Sefa Dei et al. 2002:6). In other words, the legitimacy of indigenous concepts is being further jeopardised by the present economic and cultural globalisation in South East Asia and elsewhere.

Nor has the objective of the dissertation been to reject the ways human resource development programmes are implemented in developing countries as useless, but to substantiate that human development is a concept that has different meanings in non-indigenous and indigenous milieus and hence negative consequences for ethnic minority groups. The humanistic understanding of human development seems to be superseded by an economistic approach in the development process in the Lao PDR and Thailand.

In the era of globalisation, the promotion of iúniversalism of market-friendly mechanism by various international actors and agencies affect local and regional development on many levels. Not least the strategy of human capital formation through educational startegies.

The Mekong Region as such is the area that is least affected by globalisation due to its peripheral location in relation to the world’s power centre<sup>218</sup>. However, the development processes and priorities in the countries along the Mekong River are highly influenced by actors at different levels. Although China still plays an active role as the economic locomotive in the South East Asian region, its leading position has now to a great extent been replaced by other actors in the fourth globalisation process<sup>219</sup>, that imposes itself through already existing channels of power. The main state actors at the global level are Japan, Germany and the United States. Together with the non-state global players, the Transnational Corporations (TNCs), and semi-state actors like the WTO, IMF and the World Bank and various UN agencies, are active in the region. These global actors “...have been expanding their activities in accordance with their own

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<sup>218</sup> Yunnan Province in China is the only part of the Mekong Region that belongs to one of the five UN great powers with veto power (Theeravit in Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003:49)

<sup>219</sup> According to Joel Spring the world has lived through 4 stages of colonisation. 1: Christianisation (Spanish Empire), 2: Civilising mission (British Empire and French colonisation), 3: Development and modernisation (United States Imperialism), 4: Transnational co-operations (Spring 2000:41)

interests and perceptions of human progress and with ...capitalist values that they assume are good for all humankind” (Theeravit in Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003:50)

At the regional level, ASEAN, and the different organisations under this umbrella play the biggest roles especially as economic consultative fora<sup>220</sup>, as well as the Asian Development Bank has a long history as financial supporter of development projects in the region. However, the impact of the regional players is considered modest as they “... often serve as agents of the global actors instead of protecting the interests of the people in their region” (Ibid.,p.51). Theeravit claims that the countries have two functions: a political and psychological task to maintain peace and stability, and to attract foreign assistance (Ibid.,p.51).

Despite divergent power structures, economic gaps and different notions of human rights issues among the South East Asian countries, the Mekong Region has been relatively peaceful since the 1990s. This situation fosters a positive environment for development, and various inter-state co-operations take place (e.g. to eradicate drug production and expand border trade). In principle, the countries can then pay more attention to national, socio-economic challenges. As one of the poorest and least developed countries in the Mekong Region the main challenge for the Lao PDR is to reduce poverty. Milloy & Payne express it as follows: “All of the Lao PDR’s neighbors are also changing their role in the global “marketplace”, but none as radically as Lao” (in McCaskill & Kampe 1997:397). The shortage of skilled technical and managerial manpower has made the human resource problem, the deficiency in formal education and vocational training, a top priority for the Lao Government, although poverty can be considered more as a social and political issue than a strictly economic phenomenon. In the regional globalisation race, both the Lao PDR and Thailand have emphasised the indirect value of education in the service of economic production. Thus education policy seems to consider education as a commodity valued as an instrument, according to the philosophy of economic colonialism that “...is spreading the educational doctrines of human capital” (Spring 1998:222).

Keeping the statement by Lytton in mind concerning the future of indigenous groups in the Lao PDR (“Il ne faut pas les laisser dans des musées”), the question is how the minority groups in general will respond to the new situation and “...how they will organise their own adaptation”

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<sup>220</sup> The most important are: the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC); ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); ASEAN Free trade Area (AFTA); and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) (Theeravit in Kaosa-ard & Dore 2003:51).

(Vienne in McKinnon & Vienne 1989:38) to a changing society if given a choice. Among other kinds of polarisation of the societal structures in developing countries the cultural heterogeneity requires a rethinking of the rhetoric of “the ethos of development”. The re-evaluation, or more precisely de-colonisation in the general development philosophy, can be viewed from three perspectives: a rethinking of aid to education and human development, a rethinking of the development concept, and hence a rethinking of development theories in the existing development discourse.

The critique aimed at the aid business in relation to education and human development is still mainly centred around the lack of co-ordination among donors, modalities in delivering or failing commitment from the recipient countries. A more appropriate recommendation in the era of globalisation would be to leave the consistent preoccupation with the technicalities of implementation to the developing world, and begin to force Western(ised) educational theorists to turn the critique inwards. McGarth draws attention to the need for a revision of the concept of education when stating “Fifty years on from Bretton Woods and the beginning of the development era, nothing less than a new paradigm for the relationship between education, development and assistance is required” (in King & Buchert 1999:87). Nevertheless, what seems to be high on the agenda is still methodologies for “...analyzing educational quality and quantity” (Ibid.,p.86).

The progression in the choice of words in the two EFA Declarations towards a more diffuse border between ‘education’ and ‘learning’ as well as a broader concept of basic education and the suggestion of abandoning the sectoral thinking do not seem to have had any significant effect on the educational aid business. Neither has there been any clarification of the question of the meaning of ‘universal’ education. Both have stalled the process of accepting indigenous learning practices and concepts as legitimate and other epistemologies than the Western behold as valuable.

The three parties involved in the development process in heterogeneous developing countries are the ethnic minority groups themselves, the national governments as agents of development and the Western(ised) development theorists, practitioners and donors. All three groups have their restrictions, their role to play, and their power. In general, there is a growing self-consciousness and awareness among indigenous population groups all over the world, and they are increasingly being listened to. Ethnic groups in many countries have established effective associations to claim their rights. However, they have limited influence, as their culture is

disrespected or even commodified as a modest contribution to the national economy as well as they are excluded from active participation in the national development process.

The respective governments are faced with serious dilemmas under the rampant globalisation process. Especially the development challenge for the Lao PDR is an excellent case in point because of the large contingent of indigenous population groups. The country's ambition to play an important role in the region and the overwhelming interest from the international community in terms of enormous flows of financial assistance pouring into the country, contribute to divert attention away from the internal dilemmas. There is reason to believe that the determined clinging to the communist ideology does not exert the main influence with regard to the attitude towards ethnic minority groups, as a similar neglect is found in capitalist Thailand. It is mainly the pressure from the neo-colonial, economic powers that forces developing countries to adopt the priorities and concepts of the West, wherein well-placed persons in the developing countries make significant gain.

It is evident that the West is still disinclined to learn from the past decades' failures in development assistance and hence the way 'development' is interpreted in the dominant development discourse. One of the failures is the conceptualisation of Third World countries as homogenous entities. On this basis Western researchers and practitioners can use well-known academic tools to explain complex issues by means of various analyses on poverty, class relations, reasons for differences in educational level or the lack of gender inequality etc.(and often incorrectly) However, heterogeneity represents a challenge to Western researchers. Because non-indigenous researchers are confronted with other realities and rationalities and not least other epistemologies that differ fundamentally from the Western worldview, they cannot use the same academic analytical instruments, and therefore the attention paid to alternative forms of "counterhegemonic knowledges... have been the least analyzed"(Sefa Dei in Sefa Dei et al. 2000:71). However, according to Sefa Dei "...the so-called 'modern' is embedded in indigenous knowledges" as this learning "...also has moral and cognitive conceptions about nature and society that is compatible with Western scientific knowledge" (Ibid.,p.72), and as such indigenous knowledge questions the "...institutional ideologies that have tended to obscure and distort their [indigenous peoples's] social realities" (Ibid.,p.73)<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> It should be noted that one can only agree with Sefa Dei in his claim for recognition of indigenous knowledge. However, in the claim for reinvigoration of marginalised knowledges he equates "indigenouness" with "Africanisation".



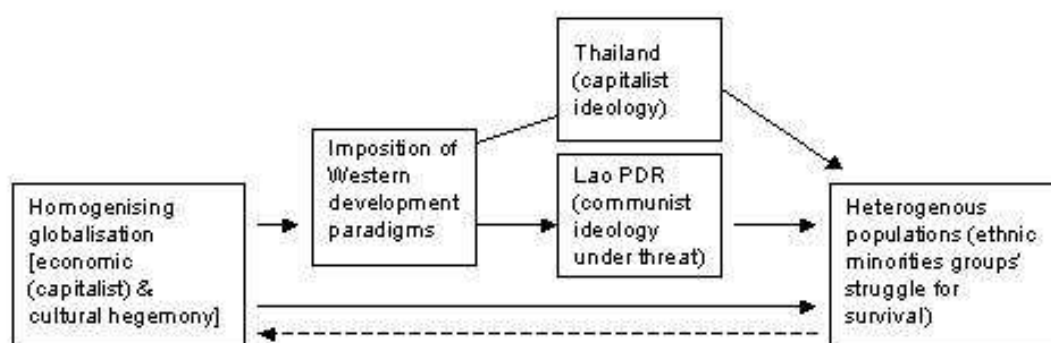
Sefa Dei's main purpose is to emphasise this lack of contextualisation of development to indigenous groups and thus he pleads for a decolonisation of international development by stating: "For the idea of 'development' to have any credibility at all, it must speak to the social, cultural, economic, political, spiritual, and cosmological aspects of local peoples' lives, as well as to their specific needs and aspirations" (Ibid., p.73).

The West did not invent the processes of development, but after World War II development as a matter of concern and a new scientific discipline has been monopolised by the Western powers. According to McMichael development has become a "project in itself" (McMichael 1996:241). The Western notion of development originated in the European context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and development was considered as synonymous with economic and social changes in connection with the increasing industrialisation and technical innovations. A widespread colonisation of the Third World had taken place since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the "European colonies were expected to make the same journey" (Ibid.,p.241). McMichael and Hirsh agree that the concept of development both in the West and within the structure of developing countries themselves should be seen in this historical perspective. The socio-political transformations in the developed world in terms of state formation, growth, urbanisation, industrialisation and the Judeo-Christian capitalist work ethics made European civilisation the ideal-type after which all other civilisations should be shaped, and development was institutionalised on a global scale (McMichael 1996 p.241-242 and Hirsh 1990:8). Modernity was tantamount to economic growth and development, and Western education became the instrument to put the process into effect as well as the standard of Western education remaining the highest step on the ladder in the hierarchy of knowledge. This semantic has never left the development discourse, neither at the philosophical nor at the administrative and political levels. Regardless of the different labels of development theories, even those claiming to be non-economistic, are influenced by the historical legacy, a colonial yoke that the present globalisation process tends to maintain unchanged, as the development project "...occurs within a field of power...also within a cultural field – in this case, the Western enterprise of endless capital accumulation" (Ibid.,p.250).

On the other hand, as the economic globalisation entails structural changes in terms of reorganisation of the global labour force and the erosion of national sovereignty McMichael predicts that "...development itself is becoming an *uncertain paradigm*" [italics in the original] and thus leads to the need for a reformulation of the meaning of development (Ibid.,p.245). He questions the notion of development not only because of the fact that the gap

between the developed and the developing world is widening, but also to the widening gap within the countries themselves (Ibid.,p.254).

As is the case with research methodologies, development theories are not value-free, and they have reached a critical stage. It is time to accept cultural heterogeneity as a counterhegemonic reality and hence the need for de-colonisation and contextualisation in the development discourse. The drawing below illustrates Western development theories in the service of globalisation and the double pressure on ethnic minority groups. At the same time it also emphasises that indigenous knowledge and worldview “...represent alternatives and challenge to dominant discourses” (McIssac in Sefa Dei et al. 2000:99).



“Indigenous peoples” has become an appealing term, and due to the attention from non-state and inter-state organisations it has become an international legal concept, not least from a human rights perspective. Nevertheless, high profiled international associations and their declarations do not alone create room for indigenous peoples to be heard. Jorri Odochao, a Karen intellectual, emphasises the lack of attention to indigenous resources by stating “Human development is not an easy task, especially with the methodology that development workers use for us. Many people wanted to develop our community, but I think development has made our community worse”<sup>222</sup>. Thus to ensure the cultural survival of indigenous peoples, to break new moral grounds in the development discourse and to take the often repeated phrase “the ethos of development” seriously, indigenous scientists and intellectuals must be involved in “The act...and science of theorizing our own existence and realities” (Tuhiwai Smith 2004:29).

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<sup>222</sup> From Round Table Meeting, December 2001, Chiang Mai, Thailand p.4 (See Appendix 3, Field Study 4)

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## Appendix 1: Selected Human Rights Declarations from 1976 - 1995

- a) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 (entered into force March 23, 1976), Article 27:

In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to *enjoy their own culture*, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language  
([www.lumn.edu/humanrts/instree/b3ccpr.htm](http://www.lumn.edu/humanrts/instree/b3ccpr.htm))

- b) Declaration on the Right to Development. Adopted by General Assembly 4 December 1986, Article 1:

The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and *enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development*, in which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.  
([www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/74.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/74.htm))

- c) Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, November 20 1989. Article 30:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous *shall not be denied the right*, in community with other members of his or her group, *to enjoy* his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.  
([www.childabuse.com/childhouse/childwatch/cwi/convention.html](http://www.childabuse.com/childhouse/childwatch/cwi/convention.html))

- d) Convention (No 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, International Labour Organisation. Adopted on 27 June 1989, entry into force 5 September 1991:

### Part 1, General Policy:

#### Article 5 (a):

The social, cultural, religious and spiritual *values and practices* of these peoples *shall be recognised* and protected, and due account shall be taken of the nature of the problems which face them as groups and as individuals;

**Article 7.1:**

The peoples concerned shall have the *right to decide their own priorities for the process of development* as it affects their lives, beliefs institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development. In addition they *shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes* for national and regional development which may affect them directly.

**Article 7.3:**

Governments shall ensure that, whenever appropriate, studies are carried out, *in co-operation with the peoples concerned*, to assess the social, spiritual, cultural and environmental impact on them of planned development activities. *The results of these studies shall be considered as fundamental criteria* for the implementation of these activities.

**Part VI, Education and Means of Communication**

**Article 27:**

Education programmes and services for the peoples concerned shall be developed and implemented in co-operation with them to address their special needs, and shall *incorporate their histories, their knowledge and technologies*, their value systems and their further social, economic and cultural aspirations. They shall *participate in* the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly.

**Article 28:**

*Children* belonging to the peoples concerned *shall*, wherever practicable, *be taught to read and write in their own indigenous language* or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong. When this is not practicable, the competent authorities shall undertake consultations with these peoples with a view to the adoption of measures to achieve this objective.

**Article 31:**

Educational measures shall be taken among all sections of the national community, and particularly among those that are in most direct contact with the peoples concerned, with the object of *eliminating prejudices* that they may harbour in respect of these peoples. To this end, efforts shall be made to ensure that history textbooks and other *educational materials provide a fair, accurate and informative portrayal of the societies and cultures* of these peoples.

([www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/62.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/62.htm))

Draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples of 26 August 1994:

**Part III, Article 12:**

Indigenous peoples have the *right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs*. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual performing arts and literature, as well as the right to the restitution of cultural, intellectual, religious and

spiritual property taken without their free and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

**Article 14:**

Indigenous peoples have the *right to revitalize, use, develop* and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, *writing systems and literatures*, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

**Part IV, Article 15**

Indigenous children have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State. All indigenous peoples also have *the right to establish and control their educational systems* and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner *appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning*.

Indigenous children living outside their communities have the right to be *provided access to education in their own culture and language*.

**Article 16**

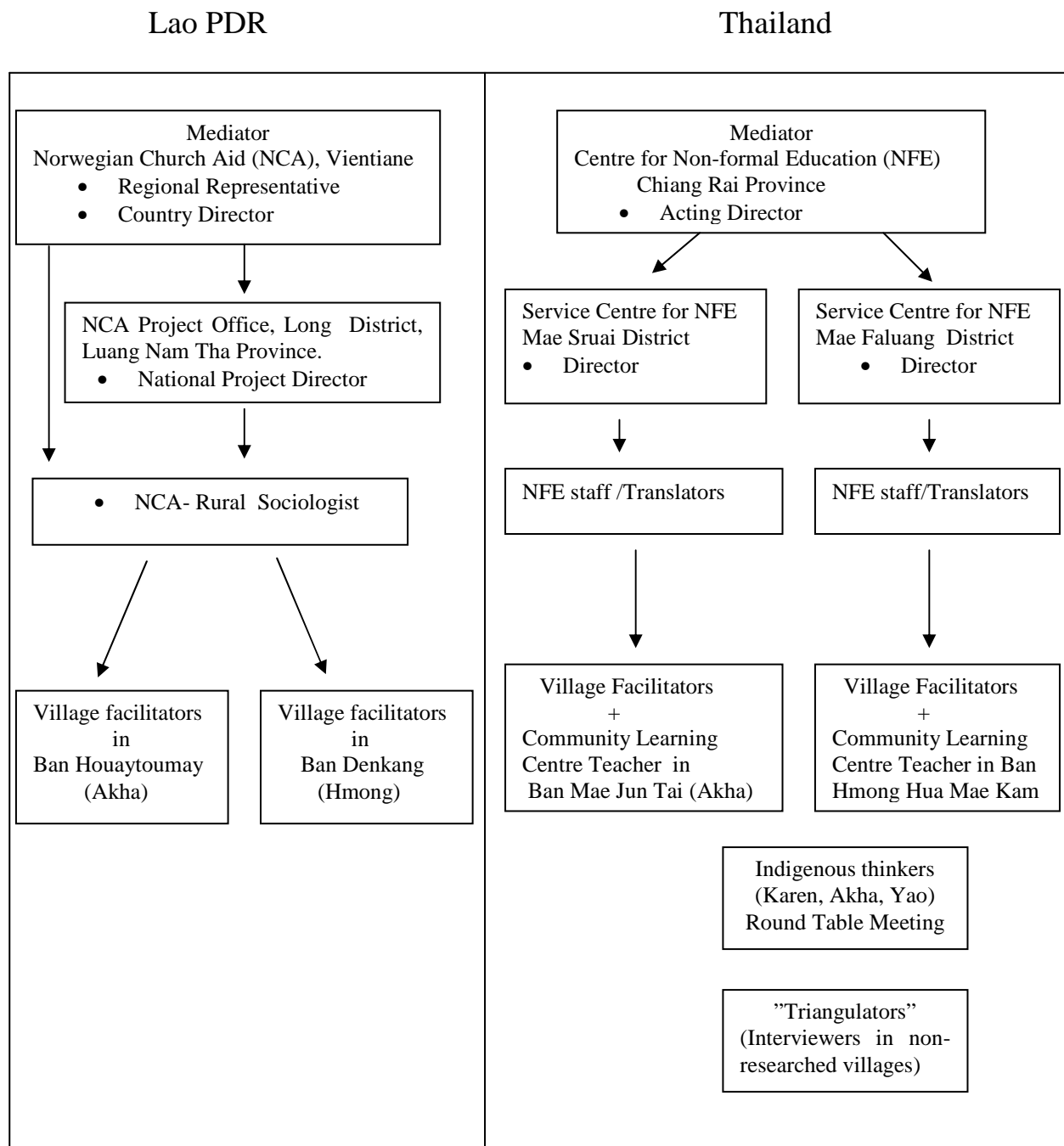
Indigenous peoples have *the right to have the dignity* and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations appropriately reflected in all forms of education and public information.

**Part VII, Article 31**

Indigenous peoples, as a specific form of exercising their right to self-determination, have *the right to autonomy* or self-government *in matters relating to* their internal and local affairs, including culture, religion, *education*, information, media, health, housing, employment, social welfare, economic activities, land and resource management, environment and entry by non-members, as well as ways and means for financing these autonomous functions.

([www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/E.CN.SUB.2.RES.1994/95](http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/E.CN.SUB.2.RES.1994/95))

## Appendix 2: Persons Involved in the Research Process



## Appendix 3: Phases in Field Research

### Field study “0” (20 August -18 September 2000 :

**Education Review in the Lao PDR (for NCA and UNDCP) – (Consultancy in place of researcher’s clearance in the Lao PDR)**

- a) Objective: evaluation of gender and drug curriculum education.
- b) Scope and methodology:
  - visits to 12 villages in Bokeo and Louang Nam Tha Provinces and talks with district and provincial education officers (Formal and Non-formal).
  - structured and semi-structured interviews and informal talks.
- c) Outcomes:
  - assessment of the effect of formal and non-formal education programmes in minority group villages
  - raised questions in people’s mind of what education and human development mean

### Field study 1 ( 20 September – 20 December 2000):

**First visit to research villages in the Lao PDR and Thailand<sup>223</sup>**

- a) Objectives:
  - to learn about indigenous education *practices* and *examples* and human development practices.
  - to establish the initial rapport and relationship with the villagers.
  - to make them reflect on their own learning practices.
- b) Scope and methodology:
  - researched villages:
 

○ Ban Denkang (Hmong)	Lao PDR
○ Ban Houaytoumay (Akha)	Lao PDR
○ Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam (Hmong)	Thailand
○ Ban Mae Chan Tai (Akha)	Thailand

<sup>223</sup> The research villages in the Lao PDR were not the same as the ones in connection with the Review.

- structured<sup>224</sup> interviews and observation on:
    - areas of learning (what did you learn and when?)
    - means of learning (how did you learn?)
    - sources of learning (from whom did you learn?)
- c) Outcomes:
- acquisition of a basic pool of data<sup>225</sup> (12 + 16 in the Lao PDR, 28 + 37 interviews in Thailand).
  - building up the relationship with the villagers and discussions on the interpretation and analysis of the acquired data.
  - recognition of which topics to elaborate on for the second visit.
  - recognition of the need for further readings about indigenous cultures.
  - initiation of reflection process among villagers.
- 

**Field study 2 ( 21 October – 21 December 2001)**

**Second visit to research villages**

- a) Objectives:
- to follow up on Field Study 1.
  - to learn about the indigenous *concepts* of education and human development and their interrelation as well as the relation to external education and human development activities.
- b) Scope and methodology:
- 8-10 key interviewees in the research villages.
  - Structured individual interviews and group discussions on:
    - Indigenous concept of learning and education
    - Indigenous concept of life improvement
    - Indigenous concept of recognition by the external society.
- c) Outcome:
- Knowledge about the differences in concepts between some indigenous and non-indigenous cultures.

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<sup>224</sup> Structured interviews seemed the most appropriate for two reasons: The main reason being that this study is not intended to be an anthropological study in which observations and in-depth discussions on cultural issues constitute a considerable part of the research. The goal is not to get deeper answers, but spontaneous accounts from the villagers on normal everyday phenomena. I have found it important to measure the concepts of the villagers in transitional societies, where they are being considered “uneducated”. Consequently, they are not too accustomed to people asking them questions, let alone learning from them.

<sup>225</sup> See matrix at the end of the appendix

**Field study 3 (December 2001 – Thailand)**

**Supplementary data collection and analysis by development practitioners (from the respective minority groups) working in long-term national development projects**

- a) Objective:
    - to collect comparable data on concepts from non-researched villages.
  - b) Scope and methodology:
    - four Hmong and five Akha villages in a “non-researched” province in Thailand:
      - 12 Hmong interviewees (7 females and 5 males)
      - 10 Akha interviewees (4 females and 5 males)
    - local interviewers discuss 2-3 days with villagers on indigenous concepts.
  - c) Outcome:
    - “triangulated” information without outside/Western interference.
- 

**Field study 4 (December 2001 – Thailand)**

**Round table meeting**

- a) Objectives:
  - to acquire a wider perspective on indigenous concepts from indigenous peoples who live in both worlds, long –term development educators as well as resident critiques.
  - to compare with my own collected data.
- b) Scope and methodology:
  - 1 day meeting with 4 people (who have all received ‘modern’ education) representing different minority groups.
  - discussions on indigenous concepts of education and human development
  - analysis and interpretation of the deeper meaning of ‘learning’ and ‘education’ as well as the trends in the externally provided education programmes.
- c) Outcomes:
  - acquisition of a comprehensive and philosophical perspective on local/ indigenous cultures.
  - high level analysis of education and human development from indigenous “thinkers”



**Field study 5 (2000-2001- Thailand and the Lao PDR)**

**Information form resource persons**

a) Objective:

- to learn from non-indigenous peoples with extensive academic and practical working experience from Akha and Hmong communities

b) Scope and methodology:

- semi-structured talks and interviews with:
  - Mrs. Jacquelyn Chagnon, Development Planner (Lao PDR)
  - Mr. Gary Ovington, Team Leader, Lao Australia Basic Education Project, MoE (Vientiane, Lao PDR)
  - Ng Shui – Meng, Programme Co-ordinator, UNICEF (Lao PDR)
  - Mrs. Andrea Schröter, Education Adviser, NFE Development Centre (Vientiane, Lao PDR)
  - Mme Somsisouk Inthavong, Community Mobilisation Manager, MoE (Vientiane, Lao PDR)
  - Dr. Leo Alting von Geusau, anthropologist (Chiang Mai, Thailand)
  - Achan Damri Janapiraganit, Deputy Director of NFE Centre (Chiang Rai, Thailand)
  - Mrs. Juthama Rajchaprasit, Head of the Academic Section of Hill Areas Development Foundation (Chiang Rai, Thailand)
  - Mr. Kittisak Ruttanakrajangsri, IMPECT (Chiang Mai, Thailand)
  - Mr. Pongthon Chayatolachat, Director, Hill Tribe Education Centre (Chiang Rai, Thailand)
  - Mr. Prasert Trakharnsuphakorn, Former Director of IMPECT (Chiang Mai, Thailand)

c) Outcome:

- acquisition of a differentiated view of the difficulties in the two countries with regards to the efforts of the adaptation of minority groups into modern society.

**Interviewees – Field Study 1 and 2**

Hmong			Akha		
Lao PDR					
Age	Male	Female	Age	Male	Female
< 20			< 20		
20-40	2	1	20-40		2
> 40	6	3	> 40	10	4
Subtotal	8	4	Subtotal	10	6
Thailand					
Age	Male	Female	Age	Male	Female
< 20		2	< 20		3
20-40	10	3	20-40	12	7
> 40	10	3	> 40	9	6
Subtotal	20	8	Subtotal	21	16

## Appendix 4: Matrices for Systematisation of Interviews

There are three matrices that have been utilised by the outside researcher to systematise the collected data and they are listed below:

- a) Areas of Learning
- b) Sources of Learning
- c) Means of Learning

Matrix b) “Sources of Learning” shows an example of how the researcher has worked with the data. Within the matrix 2000 and 2001 refer to the years in which the field research was carried out. The numbers immediately following the years refer to the page numbers in the transcribed interviews.

a) Areas of Learning  
(What did you learn?)

<div>Villages</div> <div>Topics</div>	HMONG			AKHA		
	Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam/Thailand	Ban Denkang/ Lao PDR	Non-research Villages/Thailand	Ban Mae Jun Tai/ Thailand	Ban Houaytoumay/ Lao PDR	Non-research Villages/Thailand

**b) Sources of Learning**

(From whom did you learn?)

<div style="text-align: center;"> <div style="display: inline-block; transform: rotate(-45deg); transform-origin: center;"> Villages Topics </div> </div>		HMONG			AKHA		
		Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam/Thailand	Ban Denkang/ Lao PDR	Non-researched Villages/Thailand	Ban Mae Jun Tai/ Thailand	Ban Houaytoumay/ Lao PDR	Non-researched Villages/Thailand
M	Parents				2000, p. 11, 13, 14, 39		
F	Parents				2000, p. 6, 31, 37		
M	Relatives				2000, p. 11, p. 15		
F	Relatives				2000, p. 6, p. 21		
M	Other Villagers				2000, p. 16		
F	Other Villagers				2000, p. 6		
M	Outside Village	2000, p. 13-14/47			2000, p. 13		
F	Outside Village	2001, p. 7, 10					
Nature					2001, p. 11, 8		

**c) Means of Learning**  
(How did you learn?)

<div><div></div><div>Villages</div><div>Topics</div></div>	HMONG			AKHA		
	Ban Hmong Hua Mae Kam/Thailand	Ban Denkang/ Lao PDR	Non-research Villages/Thailand	Ban Mae Jun Tai/ Thailand	Ban Houaytoumay/ Lao PDR	Non-research Villages/Thailand

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